TREASURE OF CARCASSONNE

BY A. ROBIDA

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reasure of Carcassonne

TREASURE OF CARCASSONNE

BY ALBERT ROBIDA

Translated from the French by Frederic Taber Cooper

"See what a treat I am giving you, its a gala day today, and you shall have your fill of music. Come! Come! Be merry and show a good appetite! And I promise you that tomorrow I shall start in hunting for the Treasure of the Visigoths, and I shall not stop until I have put my hands upon it! That is that! I have made up my mind!"

So spoke Cassagnol to his wife and eight children when they returned from taking part in the royal welcome that was given to the king. For many years Cassagnol had been talking about the famous Treasure of the Great Well. For hundreds of years, everyone in Carcassonne, the walled city of France, had secretly hoped to find this treasure of the Visigoths, buried away under the guardianship of the Fairies in the mysterious depths of the Great Well. And now Cassagnol had made up his mind that he would find it.

First he would go to the aunt of his wife, who lived right next to the Great Well where the treasure was hidden. Surely she would let him dig in her garden or in her wall. Surely she would want her niece and her niece's children to have this great treasure. Of course the last time Cassagnol had spoken of it, Aunt Gironne had turned him out of the house. But he would try again, and this time he would promise her a share in the treasure.

So Cassagnol began his quest for buried treasure, and with his search there came many adventures—happenings that he had never dreamed of, and that you would never have imagined. Did he find the treasure, you ask. You will find that out when you read the story.

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

FREDERIC TABER COOPER

ILLUSTRATED BY

DOROTHY P. LATHROP

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TREASURE OF CARCASSONNE

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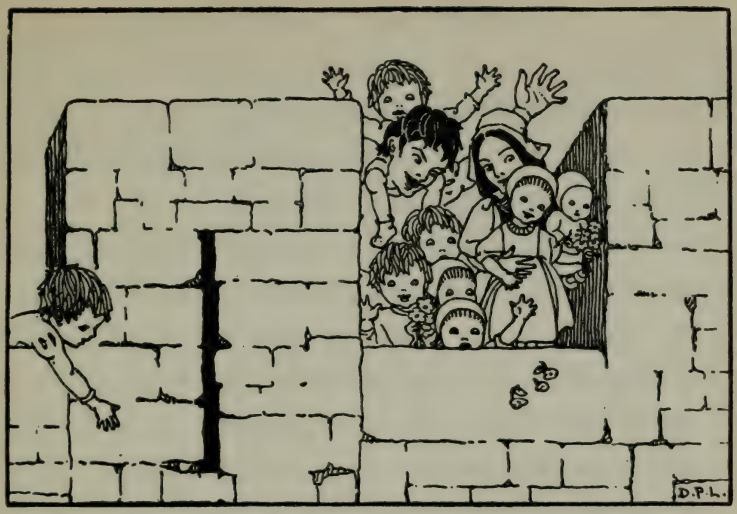


TREASURE OF CARCASSONNE

CHAPTER I

The Royal Entry

JUST as the royal escort was passing onto the narrow floor of the bridge over the Aude, a burst of sunshine split the clouds and threw a flood of light upon the extraordinary skyline of ramparts and towers that crowned the crest of the hills rising above the right bank of the river. The coun-

try on all sides was mountainous and broken into tawny ridges, over which climbed long lines of trees, marking roadways that lost themselves in the far-off pink and blue horizons.

A brilliant company of noblemen, who had gathered from Razès and from Carcassez and from many another point throughout the province of Languedoc, rode gaily at the head. Then came a few close ranks of foot soldiers, veterans of Marignan and Pavia, in corselets of iron, with slashed sleeves, and bearing long pikes upon their shoulders.

Next, mounted upon a magnificent white horse in blue trappings, King Francis appeared in all his majesty, a gracious smile upon his face. He was surrounded by a proud and lordly group, all glitter and gay colors from the waving plumes of their head-gear to the caparisons of their horses.

Cheers of welcome crossed and recrossed from the opposite banks of the Aude, along which the entire population of the city and neighboring villages was massed. Following behind another company of pikemen, came many gaily dressed ladies of rank with their cavaliers, some mounted, some

on foot, following the royal escort, and mingled with them were heads of corporations and city merchants in gala costume.

They ascended toward the city, through the suburb of Trivalle, along a dusty road, with alternate stretches of glaring sunlight and arching avenues of great plane trees.

High up on the right the towers looked as though they too were doing their best to climb the steep side of the hill. Tall, slender towers, one of which upheld a windmill; then came a bend in the rampart, and there rose the great Trésau Tower, surmounted by its turrets; and just beyond stood the imposing mass of the Narbonne Gate, protected by its barbican.

Here a group of officials, the Seneschal, who was Governor of the Castle, and the City magistrates, awaited the King and prepared to welcome him with speeches. They stood before the drawbridge; above them rose the rampart of the round barbican, its battlements thronged with cheering crowds; above these crowds rose another rampart, a frowning wall of rugged rock, and the two enormous towers of the Narbonne Gate,

pointing forward like a huge out-thrust jaw.

To the left, other towers, all differing in form and height, rose at regular intervals clear to the southernmost angle, marking the double line of outer walls.

Banners dotted over with *fleurs-de-lys* framed the statue of the Virgin above the gate, banners floated from the battlements, and still others waved from the summits of the towers. The royal escort had halted; the King's horse curvetted, and flocks of pigeons, startled by the noise and the cheering, rose and sped across the sky.

Oh, glorious Sun of Languedoc, flood our City with thy gold,
In homage to the Lilies, make our roses all unfold . . .

Monsieur the Seneschal had produced his manuscript and begun his address. It sounded like poetry, and in fact it was not in ordinary, every-day prose. Monsieur the Seneschal was one of the most distinguished personages in the province, a man of letters, and he wished to do honor to King

Francis, who loved literature and sought to foster it throughout his kingdom.

The notables and the fair ladies who stood behind the magistrates, and even the crowds leaning down from the battlements, all strained their ears to miss none of the beautiful lines in this address. The King and his nobles listened with apparent interest, though they were kept busy controlling their horses, that tossed their heads and set their harnesses a-tinkling, with no small show of impatience.

In the embrasures of the barbican overlooking the level space where the King had halted, a fine little family group was leaning over, and its members were among the first to cheer and to shout down their vigorous approval when Monsieur the Seneschal had finished his address.

The father was carrying one child astride his shoulders, while he held three or four others in a bunch before him. The mother had a little dark-haired girl clinging to her neck, and a baby of apparently not more than eighteen months in her arms. That made seven. But was that all? No,

indeed, for there was an eighth, a big twelve-year-old lad, who occupied an embrasure all to himself, from which he stared down at the King, the nobles, the horses, captains and soldiers, with such wide-open, fascinated eyes that he almost forgot to join in the cheering.

This man and his children, in spite of their shabby clothes, certainly occupied much better places than many of the leading citizens, who were crowded beneath the gate, or catching mere fragmentary glimpses of the procession through some narrow loophole.

How in the world had this man, this worthy Antoine Cassagnol, succeeded in gaining a vantage-point like this? That is a secret which we shall reveal at once. Cassagnol was a fine young fellow and a simple gardener by trade. But he was also a musician, who played his long flute at weddings and festivals, and was well-known not only in Carcassonne but throughout the whole district round-about. The last of the troubadours, in short, for not content to set folk a-dancing to the tunes of his flute, accompanied by cymbals strapped to his knees, Cassagnol could also sing; and he impro-

vized verses in honor of bridal couples, or of any saint whose feast day was being honored, or any other subject for which there was demand.

So, naturally, it was he who had secretly prepared an address in verse, for Monsieur the Seneschal to read in welcoming the King, and no less secretly a complimentary speech in prose, for one of the Consuls to read—but this is something which we must not tell!

No sooner had Monsieur the Seneschal finished reading his verses than Monsieur the Consul began his complimentary address. You see now, of course, that it was these two gentlemen who had passed the word to the Sergeant of the Guard commanding the Narbonne Gate that he was to let pass the Cassagnol family.

Presently it became the King's turn to utter a few gracious words in reply to the Carcassonne officials; whereupon the cheers and shouts redoubled. Banners were waved, hats were tossed, flowers rained down from the battlements, horses pranced, and the royal escort resumed its march, crossed the drawbridge of the barbican and passed beneath the arch of the Narbonne Gate.

"Quick, start on, Colombe, let's follow!" cried Cassagnol.

Colombe was Madame Cassagnol's Christian name. She was tall and dark, with a dense mass of unruly hair, a rather thin but active woman, who seemed possessed of at least three or four arms, if you could have seen her twisting and turning those restless, impatient children, who clung to her, dragged at her skirts, crept under her arms and swarmed up her shoulders.

"Come, children, hurry up!" cried Colombe. "We mustn't miss any of these fine ceremonies, these gorgeous gentlemen in silk and velvet, these captains in full armor . . ."

"Quick, follow on behind the soldiers," ordered Cassagnol.

Colombe plumped down three of the children upon the ground and hurried toward a corner of the palisade below the barbican. Here, munching a few stalks of worthless weeds, a donkey waited philosophically, careless of the lords of the earth or of speeches in verse or in prose.

This was Belleàvoir—which means "Beautiful-to-Behold"—a female donkey of ripe age, with a

COLOMBE GRIPPED BELLEÀVOIR BY THE BRIDLE

coat that in patches was still abundant and shaggy, while elsewhere it was worn to the bare hide. Belleàvoir was still loaded with her saddle baskets, the baskets in which Cassagnol, in his capacity of gardener and not of troubadour, carried his vegetables to market.

Colombe hastily piled four of the children into the baskets, tucked a fifth under her arm and gripped Belleávoir by the bridle. Cassagnol took charge of the three oldest, and the family fell into step behind the pikemen of the rear guard, to enter the city with them.

HOW THE CASSAGNOL FAMILY FEASTED

CHAPTER II

How the Cassagnol Family Feasted

IT HAD really been a great day. After his reception at the Narbonne Gate, the King went directly to the Cathedral of Saint Nazaire, thence to the Castle, and after that, accompanied by some of his captains, he made an inspection of the city. It was a formidable fortress in times of war, and he examined all its defences, finding them in perfect condition, needing only to be maintained as they were, to bid defiance to any enemy.

Crowded into the narrow streets, packed close in the public squares, and bunched along the sharp ascents, the citizens pressed in from every side to follow the soldiers and hail the King as he passed by.

Cassagnol dragging his boys with him, and Colombe leading Belleàvoir by the bridle, followed everywhere. They found places under the crenellated porch of the Cathedral, they toiled up past the Castle, where Belleàvoir found some reward in munching the thistles that sprouted here and there in the herbage of the moat. They followed the King the whole length of the first encircling wall along its inner side, and then again along the palisades between the two series of towers, going wherever Belleàvoir could go. The children were hoarse from shouting "Long live the King!" and tired out with so much tramping.

Belleàvoir shuffled along wearily. But Colombe was upheld by the flattering knowledge that the King had smiled upon her, for he had not failed to single out this especially noteworthy group of loyal Carcassonnians. She was filled with justifiable pride, and frankly admitted it as

she let herself drop down on a grassy bank, when they finally had to fall out of the procession before the Castle's barbican.

Cassagnol's enthusiasm had visibly diminished toward the end of their march in the wake of the King. He had begun by exclaiming joyously over every happening, pointing out to Colombe all the interesting details, praising the majestic presence of King Francis, the magnificence of his costume, the hilt of his sword or the fluttering plume above his head; the proud manner and carriage of the nobles, their glittering arms and steel corselets, the trappings and gold braids, the silks and satins of their costumes. But now his enthusiasm had fallen mute, and he had not a single word to say.

"Well, now," said Colombe, after stretching her arms, that ached from carrying, lifting, and dragging the children who had begun to lag and grow heavy. "Well, now, you are not very talkative, my poor Antoine, in spite of the fine day we have had! You have seen the King and all the fine noblemen from Paris; splendid weather too, bright sunshine, when you had feared a storm or

at least showers. Altogether, a wonderful day, wasn't it?"

"Yes, yes," admitted Antoine.

"Well, then, what's the trouble?"

Antoine Cassagnol sighed. It certainly looked as though his morning gaiety had taken wing, and the joyous troubadour, to say the least, felt his spirits sadly dampened. His wife began to worry.

"Come," said she, rising with two or three children clinging to her skirts. "Come, let's start for home. It will soon be time for supper."

This time Cassagnol sighed still more heavily, and his frowning brows and thick moustache fairly bristled. He rose to his feet, but was in no haste to start, although at the word "supper" all the children had become alert and eager.

"Yes, yes," said Antoine.

"Come on home then! Forward, march, Belleàvoir!"

There was nothing sumptuous about the Cassagnol dwelling. It stood near the *Constable's Tower,* and was just a modest cottage at the rear of a tiny garden adjoining the rampart—or to be more accurate, a mere shanty where the family

lived in very close quarters, the donkey Belleávoir under a lean-to and the children tucked away in all sorts of corners, on haphazard beds that the industrious Antoine had knocked together out of boards.

The Cassagnols had a right to pride themselves on being a fine family: four boys and four girls. Upon the birth of the younger ones, since every corner of the house was occupied and no other lean-to could be built, because that would have taken up space needed for the vegetables, Cassagnol had piled his board boxes one above another, after the fashion of cupboards, with a shelf or so for one or more children.

They were far from well off, business was slow, and no matter how hard Cassagnol worked, his various trades certainly did not keep him rolling in gold. The cabbages and lettuce showed a perverse obstinacy in growing just as little and as slowly as possible; and as for weddings, there practically were none for the time being. And yet, not only in Carcassonne but in the neighboring villages and outlying farms, people were still getting married and feasts and joyous festivals

were being held. But for the past season or two they did without music, and rarely called upon Cassagnol the troubadour, with his flute and his cymbals, to set their friends and relatives a-dancing.

And now, once more at home, the Cassagnol children were squabbling and jostling, as they argued over the splendid adventures of the day. Cassagnol himself had dropped upon a bench, and continued to utter his mournful sighs.

"Dear me!" said Colombe. "What makes you so gloomy, pray?"

"Reason enough," said Cassagnol. "Monsieur the Seneschal was well satisfied with his speech, I have no doubt, and Monsieur the Consul also; but they have not paid me. They are in no hurry to pay—I shall have to wait."

"That's too bad. But wait till tomorrow, and meanwhile let's have supper."

"Supper, supper! That's easily said, but what is there for supper?"

Colombe rushed over to a sort of larder, the lid of which served as bed for the oldest boy.

"Mercy me!" she cried. "All the folderols of

those fine ladies and gentlemen must have gone to my head. I have only just remembered that I haven't so much as a single slice of bacon left in the larder! No matter, we'll do without, that's all, and make up for it tomorrow. Meanwhile, hurry up and run out to the garden."

Cassagnol frowned again and muttered something into his moustache.

"All right, I'll run out myself," said Colombe. "A good dish of onions, a good dish of carrots . . ."

Cassagnol continued to mutter, but Colombe was already outside. The good Cassagnol took down his flute, which hung on the wall in a cloth cover, alongside his cymbals, and gloomily he began to polish and clean it.

"Ought I to go and see Monsieur the Seneschal?" he murmured, "and ask him to settle my little bill? *Tootle—too, tootle-too*—there is dust in my flute—*tootle—too*—no, he is too busy today. It wouldn't be a wise move, I am likely to encounter King Francis at his house. I am having hard luck; the marriage of Capendu's son will never be settled; the young lady can't make up her

mind—and it would be such a fine wedding! There would certainly be three days' dancing under the elm! And what feasts! Let's not think of it, it makes me hungry. Papa Capendu would surely sacrifice six casks of his last vintage, red wine and white—let's not think of it, it makes me thirsty! Colombe isn't back yet . . . Keep quiet, won't you, children! What's that? Aren't we ever going to have supper? Of course we are! Have patience, you little gluttons, it isn't quite ready yet. There comes your mother; she's attending to supper."

Colombe came in brusquely, very red and flustered.

"Well, now!" she cried. "This is a pretty howdy-do! A fine sort of a gardener you are, Antoine! I thought of course that I had nothing to do but stoop down and pull a dishful of onions and carrots and turnips, and make a good soup in no time. And now I find there isn't an onion or a carrot in the garden, except very young ones, much too young to use!"

"They won't be ready for two weeks yet," said Antoine.

"So there is nothing but lettuce! Six heads of lettuce for the whole family, six heads of lettuce and eighteen turnips. Antoine, you are ruining the garden. Not an onion can I find, but I do find plenty of carnations and narcissus. Oh, you poet! There are four rose bushes down yonder in the pumpkin corner, and the roses are all in bloom, but the pumpkins have all died."

"Hurry up and fix the lettuce and turnips," groaned Antoine, with bowed head. "We'll straighten things out tomorrow."

"That's what you always say! Tomorrow . . . tomorrow . . . when Monsieur the Seneschal has paid us for your pretty verses, or else when papa Capendu has married off his daughter! Listen, Antoine, things can't go on this way . . . You never . . . I've done a lot of thinking . . . We must . . ."

Antoine precipitately flung down his flute, hastily snatched apart two or three children who were tearing out each other's hair, and vanished into the garden. "I am going to look for some herbs, and see whether there are any plums left on the plum tree."

Colombe clattered some earthen pots together—her whole kitchen outfit—struck a light and made a fire of kindlings, to start cooking her eighteen turnips.

"Oh, that Antoine!" she grumbled, knitting her black eyebrows in a frown that made her look quite ferocious. "And yet he tries so hard, poor fellow, only he has no luck! No luck at all! It's a sin and shame! The devil himself might die without poor Antoine falling heir to so much as one of his horns! Can't you behave yourselves, children? You, there, Hilarion, my hand is just itching! If you don't stop it now, you'll get your ears boxed! And you, Fleurette, you bunch of nettles, you little plague, won't you ever quiet down? We are going to sit down to supper, do you hear me? Right away, as soon as your father has come down from the moon!"

VISIGOTHS, FAIRIES AND TARASQUES OF THE GREAT WELL

CHAPTER III

Visigoths, Fairies and Tarasques of the Great Well

AT LAST the Cassagnol family found themselves seated at table. A dish of turnips and leeks, an abundant salad with plenty of oil, five or six tomatoes and a few plums that were almost ripe, made a fine meal; but it had to be stretched to do for ten.

In spite of all the fine sights and glorious memories stored up during that wonderful day, Co-

lombe remained in bad humor and murmured many an "Oh, dear!" For all her gentleness, it was easy for Colombe to put on a sullen manner, because of her quick temper, her large black eyes and her unruly hair hanging in long tresses that at every movement went tossing and twining over her shoulders like so many serpents.

To put an end to her frowns and make their meal pass off well, Cassagnol took down his flute and broke into one of his gayest, liveliest, little tunes, the one that was most often called for at the end of a wedding feast.

"See what a treat I am giving you, it's a gala-day today, and you shall have your fill of music. Come! Come! Be merry and show a good appetite! And I promise you that tomorrow I shall start in hunting for the Treasure of the Visigoths, and I shall not stop until I have put my hands upon it! That is that! I have made up my mind!"

With the help of the music it was alarming how fast the food melted away, as Cassagnol was quick to perceive. He tried in vain to slow up matters by playing a languishing air on his flute; but they none the less speedily arrived at dessert—those few

plums which Colombe divided among the children.

"They are sleepy, poor little ones, after such a long day," said Cassagnol. "They are worn out with all the fine things they have seen! They shall go to sleep to music, and dream all night of princes and noblemen. Come, Cadette and Finette, come by-by, little ones! Follow Mamma . . . Luquet, Hilarion, you are almost asleep standing up! Don't try to fight it off any longer! And this little witch of a Fleurette, what a lot of trotting about she has done today . . . yes, and Cathounette has too . . . Off to bed with you! Luquet! Blaise! Be good, now."

The eight children were at last tucked in. The moon was shining through thin, silvery clouds that were scudding across the sky, and outlined against them in clear-cut masses of dark blue were the bulky towers rising above the flat roofs and looming over the long lines of fortifications.

Cassagnol and Colombe were sitting out in their garden, to save the cost of a candle. Cassagnol spoke never a word, but sat there pounding his knees with his fists. Colombe, who usually had a

brisk tongue, was equally silent, except for an occasional sigh. The only sound came from the lean-to, under which the donkey, Belleàvoir, munched a few stalks of hay.

"Listen," said Cassagnol at last, "listen, Colombe! I am worrying and you are worrying, and it's true that the situation today is far from cheerful; the garden and the weddings pay almost nothing. So long as the vegetables went well, the music could lie idle; when weddings were brisk we could let the vegetables take their own time. But it is really a hard run of luck that has pursued us this year. And with our little family to bring up! Listen, my Colombe, I shall not need to provide for the boys, they have stout arms, the rascals, they can take care of themselves! The two oldest have already learned to play the flute, and will soon make music as well as I. But to marry our daughters well, we must economize. The oldest is six years old already . . ."

"Almost six and three-quarters," sighed Colombe.

Cassagnol struck his head a heavy blow with his fist, deadened luckily by his thick growth of hair.

"Ah! by the hoary locks of Dame Carcas! If we could only have three hundred weddings a year, I could easily come out ahead. May the Lord multiply the betrothals round about us, marry off all Languedoc and shower blessings on our vegetables! But the weather is always too wet or always too dry, at the wrong season—and then it does seem as though nobody cared for music any more."

And more blows rained on that bushy crop of hair.

"So then, don't you see, the only thing to do . . ."

"Is what?" demanded Colombe.

"Why, the only thing to do, the only sure thing, that would set everything right, the thing I've been thinking of night after night, and nothing else . . ."

"Yes, yes, but what is it?" urged Colombe.

"Just this: I have come back to my old idea, about the famous Treasure of the Great Well; the Treasure of the Visigoths, preserved expressly for us and destined to make lords and ladies of us all. Wouldn't you like to be rolling in gold, Colombe?

I know that I would! And gold lace on all our clothes, and wonderful feasts! And I would play my flute just to please myself, and for our own lads and lasses to dance to. But we've got to find it, that Treasure of the Visigoths . . . Listen, Colombe, I must go again to talk about it to your aunt . . . She simply must give me a chance to hunt for it, because she lives right next to the Great Well, and that is where the Treasure is hidden. I must go, I must go, I simply must!"

Oh, that famous Treasure of the Visigoths! What a place it holds in the dreams of the Carcassonnians, both of the upper City and the lower Town! How they have talked it over at night gatherings, down through all the hundreds of years, since it was first buried away under the guardianship of the Fairies, in the mysterious depths of the Great Well! And how they have sought to bring it up again!

In the *Place du Grand Puits,* the public square between the Castle and the Narbonne Gate, there is a fine large Well, with a curb ornamented with some very ancient columns. Every one in Carcassonne knows that the Great Well is the work

of the Romans, who sank it down to unknown depths. Some claim that it reaches down to the centre of the earth, but that is not sure. All they are certain of is that underground passages branch off from it and extend at least as far as Lastours and Mas-Cabardès, in the Black Mountains.

Such is the legend. Cassagnol, also, had often dreamed of the Fairies of the Great Well, especially when he was a boy and used to lean naïvely over the curb, hoping to catch a glimpse of some supernatural apparition.

And he was not the only one to strain his eyes over the dark depths of the Well, striving to pierce its dim obscurity, through which vague glimmers seemed to dart, but whether simple rays of moonlight or the shimmer of pearls in a Fairy's hair, who could say? The housewives who came to the Well to draw water followed the descent of their buckets with a very watchful eye; and when they drew them up again there were some who threw a swift glance to make sure whether there might not by chance be a precious stone lying in the bottom of the bucket.

It occurred to young Cassagnol that perhaps

the Fairies stayed in hiding during the daytime, so he sometimes came at night to cast a glance down the Great Well. He had even come, with his heart beating between fear and hope, to lean above its sombre depths just as midnight was sounding from the church towers. But always without success.

There was nothing to be seen; for the Fairies took good care not to show themselves; but one could hear things. Vague sounds arose from the Well, like low murmurings or long-drawn sighs, and sometimes odd whisperings, followed by light laughter and a splashing of water. What was happening down there? The Fairies, no doubt, were laughing among themselves and making fun of the people who lived up above. And how about those splashing noises? Why, of course it was the Fairies bathing and sporting in the water.

Like many another, Cassagnol had often called down into the Well, addressing the Fairies most respectfully; but they had disdained to answer. The Great Well remained a mystery, and the Fairies and their Treasures inaccessible. The savage Visigoth warriors, guardians of their legendary subterranean homes, also remained invisible

to him, equally with the *tarasques,* hobgoblins, giant frogs and horned toads that mounted guard with them.

Cassagnol in those days had talked of these things with Father Cyprien. This good monk of the Abbey of Saint-Hilaire, seeing that the lad had an alert mind, took a fancy to him and undertook his education. To catechism and grammar he had added the rudiments of various lines of knowledge, together with some little Latin; while a bagpiper from the suburb of Barbacane gave him lessons in music and taught him to play on the bagpipes, flute, flageolet, violin and several other instruments.

Father Cyprien, when questioned, admitted that he did not believe in Fairies, which greatly distressed young Cassagnol. But he was less skeptical in regard to the Treasure of the Great Well.

"My boy," said he, "let us not speak of Fairies, who are seductive creatures invented by the pagans. But it may very well be true that in the depths of underground caverns strange, diabolical beings are hidden, *tarasques,* dragons or vampires—at least, trustworthy people say so, although as a mat-

ter of fact they have never seen them. It is possible. We know the story of the horrible and voracious *Tarasque* of Tarascon, which Saint Martha bravely went to capture with her bare hands in its own cavern down yonder on the Rhone; and other stories of many another hideous monster living in savage lands. As for the Treasure, it would seem that it really does exist."

"Good!" said Cassagnol.

"When the Visigoths held sway over all of Languedoc," resumed Father Cyprien, "they brought to their powerful citadel of Carcassonne all the Treasure of Alaric, formerly guarded at Toulouse. That is to say, all the riches gathered together during their conquests, the product of the pillage of the great Capital of Rome, and many, many other famous cities, great heaps of gold and other precious objects, pagan and Christian jewelry, statues and idols.

"Several centuries passed by, when there arrived in our lands the Saracens, followers of Mohammed, who put everything to the sack. The Visigoths, conquered in their turn and obliged to abandon the country, did not choose to leave their

riches for the wicked Saracens to enjoy; so they flung all the Treasure of Alaric into the Great Well of the city, an unfathomable well, the bottom of which no one has ever yet found . . . And the Treasure is still there!"

"Ah!" cried Cassagnol joyously.

"Yes, it is still there. Many an audacious fellow has tried his best to fish Alaric's Treasure up again; but they have all had their pains for nothing. Always, at the very moment when they thought they had only to reach out their hand and seize it, some bit of witchcraft has interfered and left them utterly discomfited!"

"That was tough luck," said Cassagnol, making a grimace.

ACCORDINGLY, on the night of King Francis' visit to his loyal city, Cassagnol, sick of his bad luck, recalled all of these stories to his wife Colombe, and did his best to inspire her with a hope for easier and more prosperous days.

"Yes, yes, smooth your brow, Colombe. This Treasure is to be yours, and I myself mean to bring it to you . . . not in my hat, to be sure, for

that wouldn't begin to hold it! . . . but in my arms or in Belleàvoir's saddle baskets, or I know not how. I want to lay it at your feet. Can't you see it, all this Treasure, lying there on the ground, in this poor home of ours? Can't you see the heaped-up gold, the jewels, the trinkets . . . and the children just rolling on them? Yes, I know, many another fellow has hunted for them. But they have all been a stupid lot, they have searched the wrong way, they haven't known how, they haven't dared to go down to the bottom, the very lowest bottom of the Great Well."

"And would you dare?" cried Colombe, quite startled.

"Of course I'll dare!" cried Cassagnol, striking a posture under the admiring eyes of his wife. "Of course I'll dare; and I mean to be less clumsy and more clever than the others have been! I have been planning about it for a long time. Besides, we shall have a better chance than the others, for Aunt Gironne's house faces on the Square, close to the Great Well—just six and a half paces, for I've measured it. That's why I want to make

my start from your Aunt's house, and reach the Great Well by tunnelling under . . ."

"But you know perfectly well that my Aunt won't let you dig holes in her garden or in her wall, even for the sake of finding the hiding places under the Great Well. She has no belief in it. She says that after she is gone you can do as you please, but so long as she is there, you shall not give one stroke of a pickaxe on her place. The poor woman loves peace; she is afraid of Fairies; and besides, she says that the house, old and frail as it is, might come tumbling about her head."

"We must convince her that there is no danger."

"That's impossible, you have tried already. The last time you dared to speak of it, she simply turned you out of the house!"

"I know all that! Your Aunt Gironne is miserly and stubborn. Why, tonight, for instance, when we ran short of provisions, hadn't we a right to go and ask her to give us supper? When one has nephews and nieces like us, one should treat them like pets! But we didn't dare to go near her, and instead we supped on music and fried onions!

She's stingy, I tell you! No matter, I shall go just the same and ask her to let me dig for the Treasure, on condition that I take every precaution not to tumble her house down! I shall go to-morrow morning, and naturally I shall promise her a share of the Treasure."

AUNT GIRONNE'S HOUSE

CHAPTER IV

Aunt Gironne's House

CASSAGNOL did not go the next morning, after all, to see Colombe's Aunt, for an urgent bit of garden work delayed him. And then he had to stop at Monsieur the Seneschal's, who chose to be generous.

Carcassonne was still all in a turmoil over the King's visit. They had to entertain him with folk dances in front of the Castle, and naturally

Cassagnol and his flute were engaged, along with all the other town musicians.

Cassagnol was rather in dread of offending Aunt Gironne, whom he regarded as bad tempered and crotchety. So he tried to screw up his courage by picturing to himself all the possible riches and marvels of the famous Treasure. With his spirits elated and his heart valiant, he had at last made up his mind to knock at his Aunt's door. But on his way back from Monsieur the Seneschal he learned that no one had seen the poor Aunt during the whole of the previous day, at a time when every one else in Carcassonne was out of doors, welcoming the King and the fine lords on horseback.

Colombe at once hurried over to see her. Alas! the good woman was ill and could not stir from her bed. It was a serious case, so Colombe at once settled down to nurse her.

There could be no question now of speaking to her about the Great Well and of Alaric's Treasure. Besides, Cassagnol had plenty to do, tending his garden and his eight children and Belleà-

voir, who was having a dull time. He had to run back and forth between the two houses taking care not to mislay any of the children as he did so.

Despite her careful nursing by Colombe, who was on her feet night and day beside the sick-bed, within less than a week all was over for the poor old Aunt.

So now the Cassagnol family moved into the house facing on the Square of the Great Well. For a while after that, Cassagnol was so very busy that he stopped thinking about the Treasure. But little by little he came back to it.

This was because every morning when he opened his window his glance necessarily fell upon the mysterious Well. All day long he heard the creaking of the pulley or the chatter of the women as they drew up the water. And he could not prevent himself from dreaming of those hidden riches to which he was now so close a neighbor. What a temptation! There the Treasure lay! He could almost touch it, perhaps he was walking above it! Just a matter of a few blows of the pick

and he would have it! But where was the right spot to start? That was the question, where was the right spot?

And whenever he went himself to draw water, to sprinkle the garden or for Colombe's washing, as he bent over the curb—knowing quite well that he could make out nothing in that dim shadow, nothing but profound and mysterious blackness—how he strained his eyes to pierce it! And how he would listen, in the hope of catching some sound besides the vague splashings, of hearing some murmur of far-off voices, some song of the Fairies or Naiads who were the guardians of the Treasure!

Just once he leaned a little too far, because he thought that he made out some faint blue glimmer, a mere thread of light stealing along the stones at the very bottom. He narrowly missed falling in and joining the Fairies forever, by crushing his head against the stone walls of the Well. Luckily he gripped the rope and recovered himself; but he vowed that he had felt two hands reach up and seize him by his coat-collar and clutch him by the hair.

"I am going down there!" he muttered, with

beating heart seating himself on the steps of the Well. "I am going down to have a look at those wicked Fairies, but I am going in my own fashion and not like that!"

He set resolutely to work, drawing plans and minutely examining every stone of the house and every foot of the garden. The house was small, of rude, old-fashioned stone-work, resting on ancient substructures. The garden in the rear was not very large, and bordered upon other gardens and other old houses, above which rose the tall Visigoth towers of the oldest part of the city wall.

There was one of the Visigoth towers, the Windmill Tower, that sank its base straight down into the garden; and since it was pierced by a couple of breaches, that looked like wide-open eyes, it seemed to be staring down from over Cassagnol's roof and keeping watch over the Great Well and its Treasures. As Cassagnol worked and meditated, he felt as though the suspicious gaze of that old Tower rested heavily upon him.

Before long the garden was riddled with deep holes, much to the damage of some of the vegetables that were struggling to sprout in the rocky

soil. Cassagnol kept hoping that he would encounter an underground tunnel leading toward the Well; he dug down as far as possible in each successive hole, and then, finding nothing but old stones and sometimes bits of old foundations, with beating heart he would move on, to continue his search in some other corner.

Nevertheless those underground ways must exist, for tradition guaranteed it. But no doubt they were buried far deeper below the surface, or at some other point, and coming from a different direction.

"Courage and keep the pick working!" Cassagnol told himself as he moved from one hole to another without losing heart. "I am bound to find that Treasure!"

Colombe, who did not share his confidence, protested loudly. These holes were putting the little garden in a very sad state. They had undermined and almost ruined Aunt Gironne's gooseberry bushes, "in full bearing, Antoine, in full bearing!"

But Cassagnol wasted no time bemoaning the fate of the gooseberry bushes, whose existence was

compromised by every blow of his pick. He was tortured by quite other anxieties. For all at once a dark, bearded, ill-looking fellow, unknown to every one in the quarter, had come and installed himself directly opposite the Cassagnol house, on the other side of the Great Well.

From the very first day Cassagnol had formed a bad opinion of him and had said so to Colombe. The man was a squinting, sly, crafty creature, with a restless, shifty glance that promised nothing good. That glance was forever on the move, forever turning back toward the Great Well and roving around it, as though it sought to pierce its very stones.

Every time that Cassagnol put his nose out of doors, his eye caught the old scoundrel's shifty gaze, that was instantly lowered or turned aside, while the man himself stared into space, pretending an indifference that did not in the least deceive the acute Antoine.

"No doubt about it!" Antoine said to Colombe. "Just watch the creature; you'll see him coming and going across the Square, between his house and the Great Well, acting as though he were count-

ing his steps. That crook is also hunting for the Treasure—our Treasure! And you know, he doesn't belong around here, nobody here knows him. So we must speed up and not give him a chance to take the Treasure from under our very noses!"

Cassagnol could not sleep that night, he just thought and thought all night long. The garden had yielded nothing, and evidently was not going to. He would have to search elsewhere for the underground hiding place. And the best method, he decided, was to dig beneath the house itself, starting from the cellar.

Now the cellar was quite deep and oddly shaped, branching off to one side and ending in rubbish heaps that perhaps were the débris of other caved-in vaults.

If he had only begun his search in these rubbish heaps, no doubt he would have achieved his purpose by this time.

At early dawn Cassagnol established himself in the cellar and began sounding the walls here and there. From which side should he make a start? Did the Well lie in this direction or in

that? Over this way, of course, for here he would be directly beneath the street, with the Well a mere six and a half paces off, which was nothing at all. But he would have to prop up his tunnel very solidly.

"You know that you ought to transplant the lettuce and that the beans are doing badly. For the past two weeks there has been a drought! Not a drop of rain, not a drop anywhere excepting in the North, where they have had floods . . . those people up North have all the luck! Down here we have to take the place of Saint Médard," cried Madame Cassagnol, "and do all the sprinkling ourselves!"

"I'll do it, I'll do it!" answered Antoine. "Just as soon as I get my clue." And he drew lines and crosses on the cellar wall, gave a few blows with his pick and knocked out several stones, leaving an opening.

"Yes, but now the task is becoming harder," he meditated, scratching his head. "This is the delicate part of the enterprise, for I have to tunnel under the street, and that's a heavy weight to prop up—the street, with its pavement, the people

on it, and everything! Mercy on me! By the horns of a *Tarasque!* I shall have to make the tunnel very narrow and shore up all the earth very carefully. It will be a hard job! And then there are always a lot of gossipy women around the Great Well, chattering over their buckets and baskets. They are going to give me no end of trouble!"

"Antoine! Antoine! You are pounding too hard!" Colombe called down again from upstairs. "Look out what you are doing down there!"

"No danger, my Colombe!" replied Cassagnol. "I am tapping quite gently. One! Two! Three! One more stone out of the way. But, plague take it! There are wagons passing overhead sometimes . . . I hadn't thought of them . . . they ought to be forbidden, they are too heavy, with their big horses! Well, there's no help for it, I've got to dig underneath, just the same!"

"See here, Antoine, are you trying to bring down the house on our heads?"

"No danger, my Colombe! . . . Yes, I must work softly, very, very softly, and make no noise, for it won't do to disturb the Fairies. They

mustn't suspect anything, for they would be quite capable of moving the Treasure away, and then I would have had all my pains for nothing."

This prospect made Cassagnol's crisp mop of hair fairly rise on his head. He shivered and began to handle his pick with a caution and gentleness that somewhat reassured the anxious Colombe.

COLOMBE'S BAD DREAMS

CHAPTER V

Colombe's Bad Dreams

CASSAGNOL passed all his time in the cellar, or rather in his tunnel. He was seldom interrupted. One wedding spoiled part of a day; and then he went two or three evenings to play his flute at the *Tête-Noire,* the Black-Head Inn, quite close by at the corner of the *Place du Grand Puits* and the *Rue Porte Narbonnaise.* And that was all.

Colombe took his place as gardener. It was she who now tended the vegetables, spading, planting and watering. The older children helped her, and with much hard work they filled in and levelled off the holes Cassagnol had dug in the garden. From time to time Colombe gathered cabbages and lettuce, piled them into one of the saddle-baskets on Belleàvoir's back, placed two or three of the youngest children in the other basket as a counterweight, and took her way down to the lower town to sell her vegetables.

"I am not helping you much in the garden, these days, my poor Colombe," groaned Cassagnol, "but you know, I am hard driven by this serious business. I must hurry, you see, because that other fellow, the old rascal who lives opposite, is forever squinting his eye at the Great Well, the dirty sneak! I am sure that he is tunnelling too, from his side. He has a garden on the rampart, but that is just for a blind. I am sure he's plotting something over our way."

"You worry me to death!" said Colombe.

"Yes, he throws a shifty glance towards us, and then he rubs his hands together. Perhaps he has

the evil eye! I am sure he is laughing at us."

"Oh, no! Oh, no!"

"But I tell you he is! We must make haste. Fortunately I have made a hole that lets light into the cellar; otherwise I should ruin you with the candles I'd have to burn. Phew! but I am hot, Colombe!"

"There you go, complaining, when you are in a nice cool place, while I have to work in the garden, in the broiling sun!"

"Yes, but mine is really hard work, heavy strokes with a pickaxe! How I'd like a big bumper of good Narbonne wine . . . or any other kind, provided it was cool!"

"Much you have to complain of, down here in the cellar!"

"A cellar that doesn't contain even the smallest sort of a barrel, or even a pint or a glassful of wine, red or white! It's a sin and a shame! I'd want to go hang myself, if I weren't sure of soon getting that Treasure of Alaric! After that we'll live like princes. Oh, how thirsty I am! But my throat doesn't feel so dry, when I let the names of all the good wines that I know trickle through it!

Castelviel . . . Armagnac . . . Margaux . . . Muscadet . . ."

"Hush, hush! Antoine! You are only making yourself more thirsty, talking like that; it's foolish! Any way, I've got to go up again, for I left the children under the gooseberry bushes, and I'm uneasy about them."

"Oh, very well, I'll keep quiet! But I tell you, when we have that Treasure, the cellar will look very different; there'll be barrels and barrels! Meanwhile, back to work again. Hand me over those boards and logs, will you? What luck that your Aunt had already laid in her winter supply of wood; it comes in handy, to shore up my tunnel!"

Cassagnol disappeared up to his neck into a hole that penetrated under the wall and opened into a very narrow gallery, which he labored hard to make staunch and solid as he drove it further, with the help of the logs and boards.

Colombe was dreadfully worried and implored him to give up his enterprise. These underground diggings were becoming dangerous. So long as it was only a matter of sinking holes in the open air,

out in the garden, it was such a simple task as to offer no risk beyond wasting his time and his trouble. To be sure, he neglected the garden. But even though he ruined it, this thorough overturning of the earth would help the next planting to grow all the better. But now that he had begun his search under the house itself he was running serious risks, real dangers that increased in proportion as he neared the Well.

Colombe lived in misery, from the moment that Cassagnol started in to work. She spent her whole time running down cellar, to peer down into the hole he was digging. And then up she had to climb again, to keep an eye on the children, stop their quarrelling and separate them where they rolled on the ground, pulling each other's hair! Then down again, to watch the progress of the tunnel and remonstrate with her imprudent husband!

"Stop a while, Antoine, the house is cracking, I tell you! You are bringing great harm upon us . . . It cracks at every stroke of your pick down there! What good does it do us to own such a fine and comfortable home if you are going to

bring it tumbling on our backs! For my part, I can't even sleep in peace any more!"

"Bah! I am careful enough, the house is in no danger, I am not going to spoil our inheritance, I am shoring it up solidly, you may rest assured!"

"You are making me spend sleepless nights, or rather, nights black with bad dreams! Last night, for instance, what a nightmare I had! I dreamed that the Visigoths and the Fairies were angry with us for trying to rob them of the Treasure they have so well hidden. And there came terrible beasts and men with great beards and long teeth, furious men who dragged me by the hair, to throw me down into the Great Well. Just imagine! Down I went, head over heels, with a great splash, falling, falling, for fifty days and fifty nights . . . and then I don't know what next . . . When I woke up, I was still falling, falling, through ice-cold water that was full of horned frogs, giant toads and Visigoths, gnashing their teeth, and Fairies, rolling their angry eyes . . . That's a bad sign, a dream like that!"

From the depths of his shaft Cassagnol burst into laughter.

COLOMBE'S NIGHTMARE

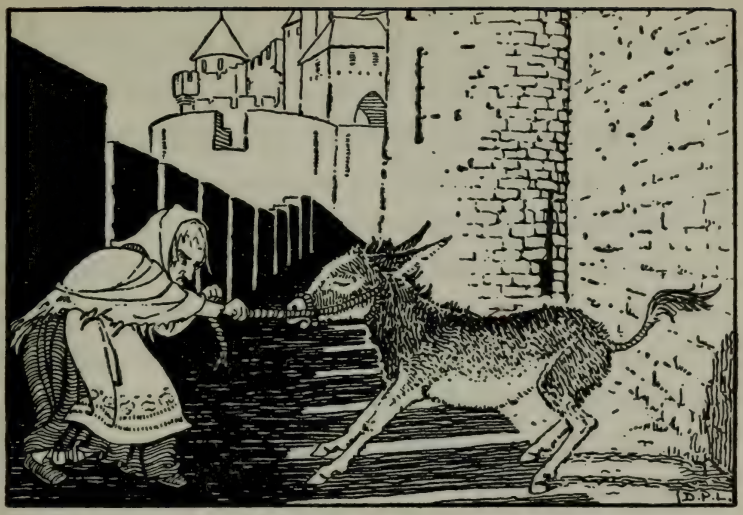
"On the contrary, it's a good sign. Water, a lot of water like that, is a sign that we are growing warm, that we are drawing near to the Treasure!"

"I tell you, the Treasure is much too well hidden and guarded! Ah, my poor Aunt Gironne was quite right when she refused to let you touch her place! You will shake the whole house to the ground without finding anything. Others besides you have already searched, and clever men too, and everybody knows that they never succeeded in doing anything but break their legs or their heads. All sorts of accidents and bad luck befell them, every one knows that!"

From the bottom of his hole, which he continued to dig softly, Cassagnol again laughed teasingly.

"How dare you laugh? Stop laughing, I tell you, for it is unwise to defy the Fairies! If they hear you, they may fly into a rage, and then look out for yourself! Please, gracious Fairies, don't listen to him or be angry, for Antoine is known all over Carcassonne as a lad who means no harm, only his brain is a little touched by a sun-stroke!"

THE HOLES IN THE CELLAR



CHAPTER VI

The Holes in the Cellar

CASSAGNOL continued his tunnelling, in spite of Colombe's lamentations and reproaches. No sooner had he returned from an errand in town, or a little work in the old garden than down he went again into the cellar.

In spite of their inheritance, the pinch of poverty still threatened, and Colombe had a hard struggle to provide the family with anything like

three real meals a day, as well as a measure of fodder for Belleàvoir, whose *hee-haws* could be heard rising and falling with greater or less harmony, according to the state of her appetite.

Belleàvoir also seemed to disapprove of her master, now that he was so constantly hidden underground. She certainly grieved, now that she never saw him seated at his ease, never heard him laughing and singing with the children, or starting up some merry discussion, in which she herself was always willing to raise her voice! She was bored, poor beast, and yawned away the hours, with her head hanging out of the lean-to window; or sometimes, if she succeeded in pulling the latch-string of the door, she would come out and stretch herself on the grass and hold converse with Madame Cassagnol's ducks. And if by chance Cassagnol came up from below, she would show her joy by rolling on the ground or by frisking all around the garden, carefully avoiding stepping in the vegetable beds.

Sometimes also Belleàvoir would escape from home, when the children carelessly left the gate open, and would wander off to hunt for thistles

in the Castle moat. Once she ventured as far as the palisades and narrowly missed being stolen by an impudent old gipsy woman, who seized her by the halter and tried to lead her away. But Belleà-voir took one look at the old gipsy, decided that she was not to be trusted, and at once began to frisk around her, rearing and flinging out her front hoofs, as though she were trying to throw them around the gipsy's neck, until finally the woman was glad to drop the halter and take herself off, just as Colombe arrived in anxious pursuit.

Cassagnol had just finished giving the older boys a lesson on the flute, and he was also teaching them to play the cymbals with their knees. They were making progress and showed a real talent for music. Nevertheless, Cassagnol was not nearly as well pleased as he ought to have been.

"Bah!" said he. "What need will they ever have for following this sort of a trade, tramping from place to place, to set all the village loafers kicking up their heels, making the rounds of feasts and weddings, all of which is sometimes very tiring? Of course they won't, for they will be rich just as soon as I have laid my hand on the Treasure

—and it can't be long now before I do. There is no need of my worrying; they will be leading citizens, Luc and Hilarion, Blaise and Pierrot, lords perhaps, with a little patience, for that is sure to follow, if I buy some sort of an estate. And Cadette and Fleurette, Cathounette and Doudou, will be fine ladies, all dressed in silks and velvets, with necklaces, feathers and jewels. They will be lovely like that. Yes, surely, with all the sacks of gold that the Treasure will bring, it will be easy. There will even be a great deal too much and I shall leave some of it, for it isn't right to be too greedy and show too mean and selfish a spirit. I shall leave part of the Treasure for others, for there will always be some clever lad turning up, who will deserve a helping hand. But I shall take a big share, enough to enable all of us to live as we please and to help out other worthy people from time to time. Colombe will be mightily pleased . . . I shall take a pretty generous allowance and leave the rest!"

He was standing on his door-step, rubbing his hands together and smiling at these brilliant prospects, when Colombe returned home leading the

donkey, that had already forgotten all about the old gipsy. But Colombe was still thinking of her, for she had seen the fight put up by Belleà-voir, and she returned still furious at the attempted robbery, much more so indeed than the event itself would seem to warrant. She patted Belleàvoir on the neck and almost kissed her; then she let herself drop down upon a big stone block in front of the donkey's lean-to.

Cassagnol stood facing her, much perplexed.

"What is the matter?" was all that he could find to say. "What's happened to put you in such a state?"

"You didn't know," answered Colombe at last, "that they were taking her away, robbing us of our poor, dear Belleàvoir! And guess who, just guess!"

"What's that, stealing her? Who was stealing? No, I can't guess."

"Dame Carcas! I clearly recognized her, it was certainly she! An old hag, exactly like the face carved in stone on the Narbonne Gate!"

"You are crazy!"

"It was Dame Carcas, I tell you! As I passed

the Gate I looked to see if the stone face was still there, and it still was, but that is nothing but her portrait. It was the other, the real Dame Carcas, that I saw, who also no doubt has something to do with the Great Well, and was trying to punish us for hunting for the treasure!"

Dame Carcas, according to tradition, was the old Saracen woman who in bygone days long defended Carcassonne against the armies of Charlemagne. The siege lasted for years, until all the besieged were dead, save Dame Carcas, the sole survivor. And for seven years longer, so the legend runs, she remained alone in the impregnable fortress, continuing to brave the armies of the Emperor with the flowing beard, to defy Roland, Oliver, the Archbishop Turpin and the other great lords. Nor did her obstinacy yield until one of the towers stooped down of its own accord and formed a bridge over the moat, thus permitting the besiegers to enter the city.

The incredulous Cassagnol believed in the Treasure, but this story of Dame Carcas was a little too much for him to swallow.

"Calm down," he advised his wife, "if they did

try to steal Belleàvoir, you got her back again, and that's the main thing. But forget Dame Carcas, she has nothing to do with it! Let's get back to work!"

Accordingly he climbed down again into the cellar, took up his tools, and began whistling, to show his scorn of Colombe's foolish ideas and fears. The work was progressing, and according to his calculations he must already be quite close to the Well. He had found some traces of vaulting and old rubbish heaps and was now up against a mass of solid masonry, which he was toiling to pierce with the utmost precaution.

What was he going to find back of this wall? The famous tunnels that led far off, into the country, or perhaps the vault containing the Treasure? Any way, he would soon know!

Having carefully cleared away the surrounding earth, he devoted his efforts to dislodging a huge stone, that was giving him a great deal of trouble. After two hours of toil, it seemed hardly to have begun to stir. Nevertheless it was coming, little by little. The mortar of the Romans or Visigoths held well, but it must give way at last.

One more effort! Cassagnol breathed hard for a few minutes and slipped his hands through the spaces on each side of the stone. Come now, another tug! Whew! There it came at last!

The stone slid out slowly and was followed by another, leaving a hole in the masonry large enough to admit his shoulders. Cassagnol moved with difficulty, packed as he was like a sausage between his close earthen walls. He even found it hard work to push the stones past him and wriggle his way toward the hole. Crawling on his elbows and stretching forward, he finally worked his head and shoulders through, closing his eyes on account of the dust and partly also because of his excitement.

He reached out an arm and found nothing but emptiness ahead of him. He opened an eye. Nothing but darkness. Oh! Oh! Could this at last be the Treasure vault? With heart beating with high hopes, he opened both eyes widely . . .

At that very moment he received a terrible blow upon the head and uttered a loud cry as he flung himself backward.

"By the hoary locks of Dame Carcas!" he roared

as he climbed out of his excavation, rubbing his head vigorously. "What a blow! It nearly knocked me out!"

"What's happened? What's happened?" cried poor Colombe, rushing down in a panic, with two or three children stumbling at her heels.

"Ouch! Ouch!" groaned Cassagnol. "If my mother had not given me a good thick head of hair, I'd have had my skull cracked . . . What a blow!"

"What did I tell you? It's too dangerous!" sighed Colombe. "Don't you see? They are revenging themselves! But who did it? Was it Dame Carcas? Or the Visigoths? Or maybe the Fairies?"

"Rub my head, will you, there, right on top!"

"Here? Is that where they hit you, my poor Antoine? Does it hurt you badly?"

"Keep on rubbing!"

"It isn't bleeding."

"Luckily I am not bald, my hair deadened the blow."

"But who could have struck you? What did you see? Come, Antoine, tell me about it!"

"I saw . . . I saw . . . Well, about three dozen candles to start with . . . and then a bucket, going down, which had fallen plump on my head! What happened was simply this: I reached a hole and put my head through, to see if I had at last reached the Treasure's hiding place. And instead it was the Great Well, and whack! a descending bucket caught me on the crown! It was so sudden, I couldn't keep myself from crying out."

"You are quite sure it was a bucket?"

"Absolutely sure, that's what it was, and I could hear, up above, the voices of the people drawing water."

"Well, now then, I hope you will give up looking for this undiscoverable Treasure?"

"On the contrary! We are getting near, we almost have our hands on the Treasure! Don't you get the idea? I have reached the Great Well; now all I have to do is to work my way around it, and I shall find the underground tunnels of the Visigoths. Come and look for yourself, pass your head through the hole, and you will understand . . ."

"No, no!" exclaimed Colombe, "I don't dare!"

"WHAT'S HAPPENED? WHAT'S HAPPENED?"
CRIED COLOMBE

"You might take a chance, just to see . . ."

"No, no!"

"How silly you are, my Colombe! How silly you are! But don't let's argue, I should only grow angry. I had better go back to my work."

Whereupon Cassagnol gave several violent blows with his pick, that sent a big stone plunging down into the Well with a loud clatter, accompanied by a shower of small pebbles.

WHAT WAS HAPPENING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GREAT WELL

CHAPTER VII

What Was Happening at the Bottom of the Great Well

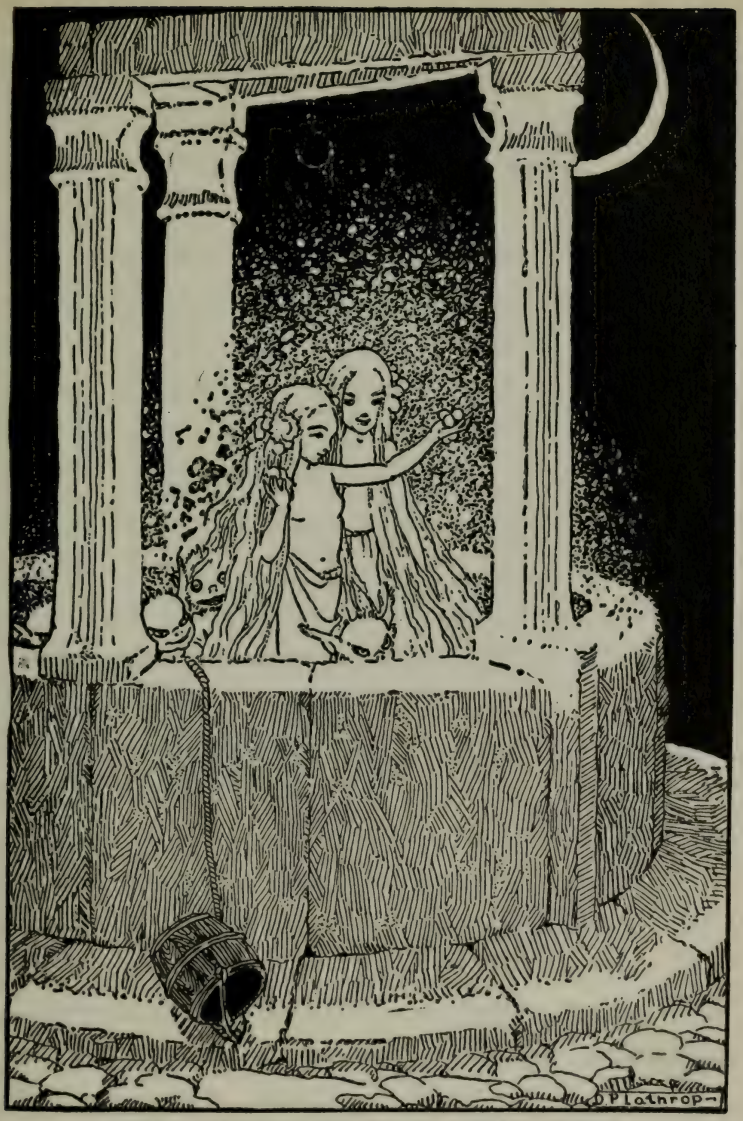
THERE was great excitement throughout the day in the neighborhood of the Great Well. The housewives gathered around the Well curb, and held council, with noisy discussion, when they found themselves in agreement, or hushed whisperings, with significant nods, after which the speakers would go their separate ways, carrying

their impressions and conjectures to the homes of friends where the news had perhaps not yet reached.

There was no use in denying that something quite extraordinary was taking place in the depths of the Great Well. Père Escoulou, an old pork-butcher and a trustworthy man, also Madame Barbicol and Madame Saboulin, and others besides, had heard around two o'clock, just as the bell was ringing for a burial mass at the Convent of the Grey Penitents, frightful cries followed by a terrible turmoil at the very bottom of the black depths of the Great Well.

They had all recoiled in fright. Père Escoulou, who was in the very act of drawing water, plainly felt the bucket dancing at the end of the rope, as though some one was trying to snatch it from him. As he was a stout-hearted old fellow, he had hung on to the rope, but it was only with a great effort that he had succeeded in hauling up the empty bucket.

When they had mustered courage to approach the Well again and look down over the curb, it had partly calmed down, but they could still hear



THE FAIRIES OF THE GREAT WELL

confused echoings, strange noises of many sorts, outcries and angry voices quarrelling. And yet, as every one knows, Père Escoulou is a little hard of hearing.

So the old tale must be true after all, about the Great Well being haunted by Fairies and Visigoths and Saracens. Indeed, there was no longer any room for doubt, and they had good cause to worry over these strange happenings, which perhaps foreboded calamities for their city.

All day long a steady stream of people filed across the *Place du Grand Puits,* some looking on a little fearfully from a distance, while others, bolder, listened near the Well, and even ventured to glance down over the margin.

No more outcries or disputes were heard. Whether Fairies or Visigoths, the spirits at the bottom had calmed down. Nevertheless, from time to time there arose the muffled sound of blows, prolonged in soft echoes through the bowels of the earth.

Among the curious there were some who were also skeptics, who, wishing to prove themselves strong-minded, shrugged their shoulders and

treated the legend of the Fairies of the Great Well as a mere old wives' tale. The inn-keeper of the *Sign of the Black Head,* facing on the Square itself, was one of these skeptics, and he had the boldness to come and draw up a half dozen buckets of water, mocking and taunting the spirits at the bottom.

Since the latter did not deign to reply, the inn-keeper departed very proudly, with the air of a conqueror. But later in the afternoon, when increasing numbers, drawn by curiosity from other quarters or from the lower town, after standing a while before the Well, began to drift over to quench their thirst at the *Black Head Inn,* beneath the sign depicting the hideous head of a bearded Saracen rolling ferocious eyes, the inn-keeper changed his attitude. He ceased to deny, returned to the Well, and came back again, shaking his head with a mysterious air, as he served bottles to his customers.

"One never knows," he declared with an air of discretion, "there is certainly something queer down below. Time will tell, we must wait and watch."

With veiled words, and pretended hesitations, he ended by hinting that it was the famous Dame Carcas, the old Saracen crone, who had returned to the haunted Well and was now starting all this hubbub after having kept quiet for hundreds of years. The reason for the terrible creature's re-awakening, was of course something that no one could tell, but they would surely find out in the end.

Meanwhile curious crowds flowed into the *Black Head* and sought to extract enlightenment from the inn-keeper, who ended by permitting more and more circumstantial details to escape him regarding the apparitions that had been seen, the infernal tumult that had been heard by all the neighbors, and all the extraordinary things which would seem to be taking place in the depths of the Great Well.

Colombe at last bestirred herself and went out into the Square, approached the Great Well and listened as the others did, only with more anxious attention than the others.

"What if it were true, after all?" she thought. "What if it were all true? We are risking a lot

more than any of the others, we are! Oh! That Antoine! How audacious he is, good Heavens! How audacious he is!"

The audacious Cassagnol gave her a bad reception when she came home to share her anxieties with him. He laughed in her face, and then in his turn he went out. In the Square he mingled with the different groups, shrugging his shoulders, splitting his sides over the tales of the old gossips, the stories of suspicious sounds heard in the depths of the Well.

He set himself astride of the Well curb, leaned over, clinging to the bucket rope, and pretended to listen long and intently.

"See here, listen for yourselves, there's not a sound to be heard in the well, not even the breathing of a fly or a bull-frog! Listen! Listen! It is quite at rest, the good old Great Well! By the hoary locks of Dame Carcas, you make me laugh with your stories of ghosts and goblins! Let her sleep in peace, honest old Dame Carcas, there is nothing left for her to do here now! As for me, I am going back to water my garden."

The next morning, at break of day, Cassagnol

descended into the cellar, to resume his tunnelling.

"It is quite simple now," he told his wife. I have reached the Well and have nothing more to do but work my way around the masonry until I come to the Treasure vault. But I must make haste, for that rascally fellow who lives opposite, that trickster who never has an honest word to say, has not even come to listen with the others at the Well, but just contents himself with looking on and laughing in his beard, like a man who knows a great deal more than he cares to say. By the horns of a *Tarasque!* I am sure that he, too, is hunting, just as we are."

"But how far down is this hiding-place, do you think?" asked Colombe timidly.

"We shall soon see."

"Supposing you do find it, but reach it too high up, you may break through the roof and fall into empty space, perhaps into the Great Well itself, which they say is ever so deep . . ."

"Oh, yes," said Cassagnol with a laugh, "and I might go on falling for six months without touching bottom! But don't torment yourself; I shan't

go as far as that, I shall just drop down on some heaps of gold, think of that! . . . on all those savings of Dame Carcas or of Alaric!"

"Or of the Fairies! And what if they are down there, waiting for you, the Visigoths, or maybe the Fairies or perhaps that old Saracen, Dame Carcas? What if the Treasure is guarded by some horible *Tarasque,* all horns and claws and pointed teeth? What will you do then, my poor Antoine?"

"Nonsense, nonsense! You are always so scary! There won't be any one there, and if there should happen to be some one, I shall be very polite."

"Oh, yes, you'll say that you just happened to be passing by!"

"Or else that I was looking for a bucket that I had dropped down the Well."

"Ah! You certainly have plenty of impudence!" said poor Colombe hopelessly. And ceasing to object, she climbed up to the garden, to put some check on the children's romping.

Cassagnol worked all day long, for he had encountered some solid masonry, stones bound to-

gether with a cement worthy of the Romans themselves; and then again a crumbling soil, the remains of a demolished gallery, really heart-breaking. It went on like this for several days, and then he had to stop work to go to the furthest opposite end of the town, to play at a wedding.

He blew forth from his flute the liveliest of airs, but all the time he was thinking of matters that had nothing to do with luring wedding guests to graceful gambols.

"*Too-loo-loo!* Ah, while I am here setting the pace for a lot of bumpkins who can't keep in time . . . *Too-loo-loo* . . . what is that other fellow, that foxy old trickster, doing? He is keeping up the search from his side. *Too-loo-loo* . . . So long as he doesn't rob me of my Treasure, that has already cost me endless toil and trouble. And I shall be kept here until midnight at least. And tomorrow morning if I don't sleep until ten o'clock, to make up for it, I shall be in bad shape . . . *Too-loo-loo!* Well, now what's the matter? The dancing has stopped! Ah, I was playing the wrong air, I had lost track . . . Where were we, anyhow?"

"I say, Cassagnol, you seem to be in a queer mood tonight," said the bride's father.

"Not at all, not at all, there's nothing the matter. Only my thoughts had gone astray, composing a neat little compliment for Madame the bride!"

"Take a good draught of white wine, Cassagnol, to keep your breath up."

"Too-loo-loo! The flute caught the air again, and the dancing was resumed. But for all his good will, Cassagnol found it hard work to drive away the fears that assailed him. He made other blunders that sadly interrupted the dancers. And it was only with great difficulty that his bewildered brain was able to recall the complimentary verses that it was his custom to sing at weddings, with certain variations to fit the occasion, celebrating the infinite charms of the bride, the fine appearance of the groom, and all the merits of the papas and mammas, the uncles and aunts, the cousins, and in short the whole assembly.

It was very late when he could at last return home. The Square of the Great Well seemed very sombre to Cassagnol. The houses slumbered with a forbidden air. Big clouds, hustled along

by a southerly gale were passing across the moon and allowed its light to gleam through only intermittently. At such moments the towers stood out in menacing relief, and seemed to move about and exchange places, the pointed pinnacles reaching up to catch the very clouds upon their weathervanes; and then suddenly they vanished as though they had melted into the blackness. The moon seemed to play at hide-and-seek, and disappeared all at once, as though swallowed by some ferocious black monster which filled the whole sky, and then showed herself again, looking down mockingly through a rent in the clouds.

Cassagnol approached the Great Well and bent his ear anxiously. With every passing blast of wind, that shook the window-shutters and the trees and rattled the roof-tiles, prolonged mutterings rolled up from the depths of the Well, ending in gasps and groans. Cassagnol was quite aware that it was the gale which produced all these noises; nevertheless he returned in a troubled mood to his home, where the anxious Colombe lay wide awake, awaiting his coming. Fearing in her loneliness some evil trick of the dreaded Dame Carcas, she

would have gladly brought the donkey, Belleàvoir, into the house, just to have "some body else" with her, as she put it, if Cassagnol should come home late.

THE INVASION OF THE VISIGOTH GHOSTS

CHAPTER VIII

The Invasion of the Visigoth Ghosts

"OH, THAT Cassagnol, who used to be such a nice fellow, the *Joyous Troubadour,* as they called him!—He is really losing his mind."

"Yes, he always used to be so jolly and kept every one in a gale of laughter with his nonsense, even Aunt Gironne for all her crabbedness."

"And yet nowadays have you noticed how ill-humored he is? And how he passes you by with a stealthy, sidelong glance?"

"And look at his face, with scratches all over it, and rips in his clothes and dust in his hair! He must spend his time loafing in taverns and quarrelling with other ne'er-do-wells like himself! And there's his nice little wife, Colombe, such a good housekeeper and so devoted to her eight children —have you noticed how worried she looks? She must be far from happy, poor woman, it's easy to guess that!"

"Her Antoine probably beats her! He's a much changed man!"

So the women gossiped over their pails and pitchers, beside the Great Well, speaking in whispers as they watched Cassagnol pass by, on his way home with Belleàvoir, after taking down a load of cabbages and lettuce to sell in the lower town.

Cassagnol, indeed, seemed anything but gay. His head was sunk between his shoulders, as if to hide a face which on one side was scraped raw clear to the tip of his nose. His hands were also scratched and peeled and the knees of his trousers showed patch upon patch.

Without a single glance toward his neighbors,

he opened his gate and quickly closed it again, after driving Belleàvoir into the garden.

Blaise and Fleurette flung themselves upon their father, Cathounette, Luc and Hilarion clung to the donkey and swarmed up into the saddle-baskets. The other three were busy with the ducks, the youngest child lying flat on its stomach, in the midst of a brood of ducklings, with the seeming intention of robbing them of their corn-meal. Cassagnol came back to reality and laughed a bit; then, before leading Belleàvoir back to her shed, he drove her a few times around the garden, with five or six children on her back.

Since this was Colombe's wash-day, she was extremely busy. So before returning to his own task, Cassagnol gave the older boys a lesson on the flute.

"It is a talent for which they will have no use," he told his wife, "since we are going to be rich. But that makes no difference. They will be glad later on to be able to treat themselves to some real music."

Colombe shook her head.

"Suppose we are going to be rich," she an-

swered, "in the mean time you are wearing yourself out and are running the risk at any moment of breaking your arms or legs, if not your head, hunting for the Treasure in that hole, and you will end by bringing the house down upon our backs! You are black and blue all over, my poor Antoine, and just look at your face! And you have no idea how ashamed I am and how much I fear that the neighbors will think it is I who have given you all those scratches!"

"Bah! Let the neighbors think what they will. As for me, down again I go to the cellar, for I am moving in the right direction now and taking soundings, and I really think that we shall strike something before long now."

Cassagnol clattered down into his cellar to resume his task. He stuck to it steadily, and Colombe had to call him several times to come to supper. When he at last appeared, he was gray with dust and had to give himself a good scrubbing. Meanwhile Colombe served the children, for they were all hungry and applied themselves eagerly to their helpings.

"Hey there!" cried Colombe all at once, waving her spoon, "there's a rat! Look at the impudence of him!"

The whole table was in an uproar, for a big rat was running around the room, swarming up everything and carrying his audacity to the point of thrusting his whiskers into a mess of onions simmering on the stove.

Colombe rushed to the rescue, the rat dropped to the ground and darted under the table, and the startled children drew up their legs and screamed aloud.

"He has gone," declared Colombe, as Cassagnol seated himself at table. "But where did he come from? I knew that we had a few mice, but not rats."

"What we need is a cat," said Cassagnol. "No home is complete without a cat."

"Oh, there he is again!" cried all the children in a chorus, but each one pointing in a different direction.

"The wretched beast!" said Cassagnol. "I'll fix him for you!"

"It isn't just one rat," cried Colombe, "there are four of them! No, there are six . . . no, eight, nine . . . ! What can it mean?"

"Dear! dear!" said Cassagnol, laying down his spoon. "And just as I was beginning my soup, too! I hate to be disturbed like that—I'll massacre the last one of them!"

It was no longer a matter of just one rat, but a round score of them, of all sizes, scampering everywhere, burrowing under the furniture and swarming up onto the table and the stove.

Cassagnol seized a broom, which luckily lay within reach, and opened battle. Many of his assailants bit the dust, the frightened children screamed as they scrambled onto chairs to escape the rats, and Colombe, scarcely less troubled, took the youngest up in her arms and distributed kicks at random in every direction.

"There, that's over!" cried Cassagnol. "Hush up, all of you! They're all gone or pulverized! Presently we'll find out where the dirty pests came from, but first eat your soup in peace."

But Colombe had no sooner set the children back at table than she hurried out to the garden, where

CASSAGNOL SEIZED A BROOM AND
OPENED BATTLE

a desperate commotion seemed to be taking place.

"What, more trouble?" groaned Cassagnol, abandoning his plate and again seizing his broom-handle. "I'm coming! Stand from under!"

But despite himself he gave a backward start, for a fresh dozen of rats ran between his legs, crowding and jostling frantically. Cassagnol hesitated; should he hurry out to the garden or remain in the house? There were evidently marauding bands of rats on both sides of him; out there playing leap-frog around the flower beds, and in here tagging each other around the table-legs and swarming up the furniture and onto the stove, where only their fear of the fire kept them from sampling the savory dish of onions that smelled so temptingly.

And what rats they were! Enormous, bristling, prodigiously whiskered rats, husky, nimble and shameless. There were young ones and old, venerable patriarchs with grizzled coats, lusty battlers marching in force at the heads of columns, and others full of youthful daring, slim in form and sly in manner, who were doing valiant scout work.

"Hurry, Antoine, hurry!" Colombe kept shouting.

"Ah, have a little patience! I am having my own troubles!"

He was certainly being kept busy, the worthy Cassagnol, for two or three of the scouts had just swarmed up his legs and onto his back. His broomstick was of no use against such a rear attack; but he chased off the bandits with his bare hands, regardless of their sharp teeth.

"You nasty beasts, I am ticklish! I'll make you pay for this!"

Two of the rats were seized just as they tried to slip down under his shirt-collar and strangled alive, while a third escaped. Cassagnol was now free to fly to Colombe's rescue.

"The brigands!" he cried. "Where does all this vermin come from? Careful, Colombe, they bite, the low-down scum!"

"Antoine, they will eat up our children!" said Colombe, who was waging a stout battle of her own. "This is another trick of Dame Carcas! It is all your fault, Antoine, all your fault! She is

doing it to defend the Treasure! Dame Carcas means to see that no one shall touch it."

"You are crazy! By the hoary locks of Dame Carcas, as I have already said, you are crazy, Colombe! Just watch me smash these vermin . . . There! That time I massacred three with just one sweep of my broomstick . . ."

"They are not real rats, I am sure they're not!"

"What do you think they are, then? Fleas?"

"I tell you, they are the spirits of the Visigoths, come to defend their Treasure!"

At that moment the voice of Belleàvoir was heard in a series of strangled *hee-haws;* and these *hee-haws* of distress were accompanied by a mighty din of kicking hoofs and splintering wood.

"She too, you see, the Visigoths have attacked her too!"

"I'm coming, Belleàvoir!"

But at this moment the door of the lean-to flew open and brave Belleàvoir cavorted out, flinging up her head to launch forth a proud *hee-haw* of triumph.

"Yes, it's the spirits of the Visigoths! We

mustn't touch the Treasure!" repeated Colombe, who had gathered the children in a bunch and stood before them, throwing stones at the rats which still marauded around her.

"It's all right, I know what has happened," said Cassagnol, who had just laid low a huge rat more audacious than the rest, and raised it by the tail to show to Colombe. "Look at this fellow, the whiskered old rascal, he comes from the stables of our neighbor who breeds pigs down in the Castle moat; I have often seen him prowling around there at night. Here, look at him, you must know him by sight too."

He threw his victim down beside Colombe, who uttered a cry of horror.

"Calm down, I know where they come from, these Visigoths of yours! It's my fault, to be sure; I must have swung too far to the right in digging my tunnel, and worked my way straight toward the Castle moat—that's how I reached our neighbor's stables, and all these rats have come through the tunnel. The Treasure doesn't lie that way; and the first thing for me to do is to fill the hole up again."

"Don't leave me! Don't leave me!" cried Colombe. "Listen! Hear the ducks! Your rats are assassinating them!"

Cassagnol caught up the broomstick again, which he had just flung down, and hurried around behind Belleàvoir's lean-to. It was here that Colombe had been raising some fine ducks, and a newly hatched brood of ducklings was to be the beginning of a poultry-yard, which she already saw in her dreams in a flourishing and multiplying state.

There arose a hoarse chorus of *quack-quacks* and a mighty beating of wings. The rats, slaughtered and chased away on the one hand, had dodged and slipped in here. Alas, they had already spread destruction before Cassagnol could reach them. The cowardly beasts, evading the fierce defence of the full-grown ducks, aimed their attack at the innocent little ducklings, which struggled in vain, and already three of four lay strangled on the ground.

Cassagnol could do nothing more than avenge them by exterminating their assassins with furious blows of his broomstick, accompanied by violent

curses. But, alas, that could not bring them to life again, and he had to let Colombe see the bodies of the unfortunate ducklings.

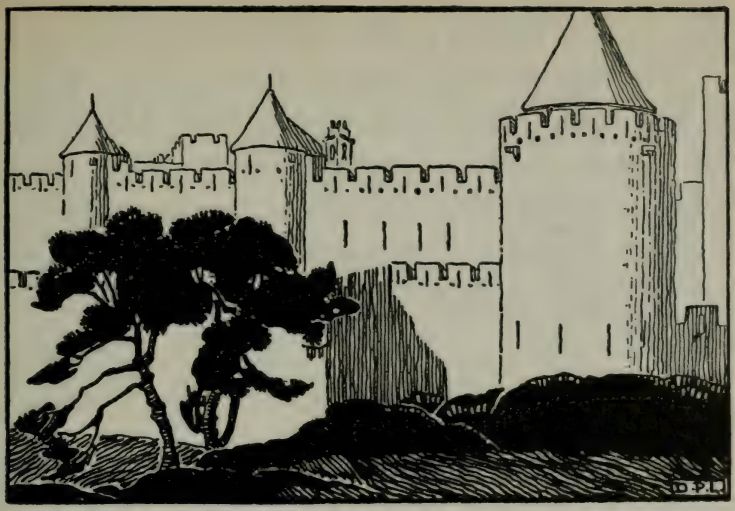
"It was my fault," he said miserably, "I realize that. It was my stupid blunder in leaning too much to the left."

Cathounette and Fleurette began sobbing, giving way to utter despair, and Colombe herself lamented softly.

"They were doing so well, and were such pretty ducklings! We are ruined! Don't go on with your Treasure hunt, for you are only bringing us bad luck. After the rats, there will be something worse! I tell you that the Visigoths will keep on defending their Treasure—don't hunt any further!"

"On the contrary, now that I know that I mistook my way, I shall begin to dig toward the right, and this time I cannot possibly fail to find it. Now, it's the same as though I already had my hands upon it!"

STRANGE DISCOVERIES IN DAME CARCAS' CAVERNS



CHAPTER IX

Strange Discoveries in Dame Carcas' Caverns

CASSAGNOL had slaughtered scores of rats and put to flight the hordes that had issued from the stables of the pig breeder; but a few obstinate ones still remained. There was no lack of holes to afford them a safe and comfortable asylum; and their presence was betrayed by their depredations.

Cassagnol manufactured a few rat-traps and caught an average of two or three a day.

"Do you suppose," said he, exhibiting his booty to Colombe, "do you suppose that if these were the spirits of the Visigoths, as you insist, they would let themselves be caught in our rat-traps? No, they are just ordinary rats, annoying of course, but we shall end by getting rid of them. Besides, it doesn't matter, if we are to be rich tomorrow, thanks to the Treasure—rich as the richest of lords, dukes or princes!"

"But meanwhile they eat up Belleàvoir's oats and keep her from sleeping in peace. And they nearly strangled another of our last, poor, little ducklings!" groaned Colombe.

"We shan't be bothered much longer with the wretched beasts, for as soon as we are rich I shall tear down the house; or rather, I shall buy a new one, much larger and finer. If I only had the time I would begin looking for a new home at once. But since I can't, you had better glance around a bit, whenever you go out, and see if you can't find something of the right sort, in a fine situation, and with plenty of room for all of us."

"There is no hurry."

"But I have no time to attend to it, I tell you.

There are always a heap of urgent little matters that keep calling me off from the one important thing, this hunt for the Treasure."

And Cassagnol tugged at his needle, heaving a louder sigh than even Colombe herself could utter. Seated in the shade, beside Belleàvoir's lean-to, he was in process of repairing a child's shoe that gaped widely at the toe and had scarcely any remaining sole. Beside him lay fifteen others in an equally pitiful state, awaiting their turn.

In the garden the boys and girls were rolling on the grass or scampering about bare-footed, a condition which did not seem to dampen their spirits, to judge from the happy shouts that mingled with occasional disputes and tears, with which from time to time the musical voice of Belleàvoir joined in.

"You see," said Antoine gloomily, "I have to turn cobbler, and meanwhile the Treasure must wait! How these little wild ones do wear out their shoes! I am forever at work, patching them up! And my own are beginning to let me know that there are pebbles in the road!"

"And my shoes too!" said Colombe. "I almost

lost a sole yesterday; I fastened it on again, but it scarcely holds."

"And there is the Treasure waiting for me, and I must neglect it all this time! I am eaten alive with impatience! Listen, Colombe, I'll work at the shoes until noon, and then I am going down to my serious work—more serious today than you have any idea of! I didn't mean to tell you until I had completely succeeded; but perhaps today, this very day, as I hope and believe, the great event will happen, and we shall have our hands on it—on the Treasure! Come down with me and let me explain to you on the spot."

"No, no!" said Colombe. "I would rather wait."

"You don't trust me, you hurt my feelings!"

"Yes, yes, I trust you, but . . ."

"Oh, I know, you are always fearing something, some other wretched mishap, like those rascally rats! But since the rats, I have done a lot of work. I realized my mistake in direction and I have slanted off toward the other side. It has gone very well since then, no more setbacks, no more cavings-in. I no longer just escape breaking

my neck a dozen times a day, as I used to do . . . no more skinning myself alive . . . the work now is almost ladylike! I would have reached the goal already, if I had only had more time, if I hadn't been interrupted by all sorts of things. Anyhow, see here, all things considered, I am going back to it now, right away! You realize, don't you, that if I stay here patching shoes, with all those kegs of gold running through my head, I shall botch the shoes, while if I get my hands on that Treasure right away, that's the end—no more need to play the cobbler! So I'm off!"

"Oh, Antoine!"

Colombe tried to protest, but Antoine had already flung down the shoe he was in course of repairing and had hit the trail to the cellar.

Colombe's Aunt would no longer have recognized it as the same narrow cellar in which she used to arrange her provisions and store up her faggots for the winter. Cassagnol had considerably enlarged it. He had made it deeper, wider and lighter, thanks to several air-holes; he had discovered archways of old masonry and had cleared out other old vaults that opened out from

the original cellar. Tunnels driven here and there opened out into the garden or even into the kitchen, where part of the tiled floor had caved in.

These labors gave a picturesque air to the cellar, but they perfectly justified the Aunt's former apprehensions, as well as the present fears of Colombe, who now slept with one eye and one ear open, so to speak, always expecting to be launched without ceremony, bed and all, into the cellar.

The other night, Hilarion, who slept on the bread box, carelessly turning over, fell out of bed with a crash, dragging several saucepans with him. Colombe, waking with a start, certainly thought that the hour had come for the whole house to crumble to its foundations. And the heedless Cassagnol did not even wake up!

Anyhow, it would all have to end very soon now, because Cassagnol was quite sure that he was almost within touch of his goal.

As he dug, Cassagnol hummed to himself, to put more heart into his work. He was in a gay mood. The certainty that he had only to stretch out his hand to seize the Treasure, after just one final effort, filled his soul with joy and put new

strength into him. And today he had need of new strength; for after working through friable earth, where the pick entered easily, he had suddenly encountered solid masonry, which did not let itself be conquered so readily.

He had no doubt that this must be some ancient Visigoth vault. It was certainly a very old subterranean chamber and apparently quite solid. The Visigoths would not have constructed such a vault just to amuse themselves or without some serious motive. Behind this wall, beyond a doubt, must lie the hiding-place, or the passage to the hiding-place, of the marvellous, long-sought Treasure!

Cassagnol toiled courageously. He dug out the mortar, and sought to loosen the stones. Already one had started, and when once that was dislodged, the others would come away more easily. He was panting now, and hot and thirsty. One more effort! Whew!

After wiping his brow, he drove the pick under the stone and pried with all his might. There, it was moving! At last, he would see what was what! With hands all raw, he worked the stone

free, as it yielded little by little. With one last strain on the pick, it fairly leaped out.

A profound, black hole. Cassagnol thrust in his pick, which all at once met with resistance, a peculiar sort of resistance, something that yielded. A strange noise arose from under the pick, a sound like the clinking of metal. As the pick went groping around, from right and from left there came the same sound.

Without stopping for breath, Cassagnol, with his brain on fire, enlarged his hole, and succeeded in dislodging another stone. Now he would be able to thrust both arms through.

"Colombe! Colombe!" he cried in a strange voice. "Come down quick! I've got it! We've got it! Close the outside door and come down . . . Wait, bring down a basket!"

Colombe heard the call, but, prudent woman that she was, she first assured herself that no fresh invasion of rats was pouring forth from the cellar.

"Come quick, Colombe," said Cassagnol in a muffled tone. "Hush! Silence! We must speak low, very low! We've got it this time, we've got

the Treasure, I can touch it with my pick. Listen!"

He again thrust the pick through the hole, and struck several sharp blows.

"Just hear how it clinks!"

"What makes that noise?"

"Piles of gold, no doubt. Listen! And further in, whole bags of money!"

"And the Fairies? The Visigoths? Has no one stirred? Anyhow, don't make so much noise; you mustn't waken them."

"Colombe, did you bring the basket? Pass it over . . . Thanks. Now, give me a little more room. I am going to reach my arms through and pick up a sample of whatever there is, behind there."

Cassagnol stretched himself on his rubbish heap, and tried to pass his head through the breach he had made, but his shoulders stuck, and he could only stretch in one arm to its fullest extent, regretting for the first time in his life that he was of such a stout build.

"Oh! Oh!" he murmured.

"What is it?" demanded Colombe, for she heard a tinkly sound that might be metal.

"Oh! Oh! It's all wet, down in there."

"It's the Well," said Colombe.

"We'll soon see. Anyhow, here's a handful, hold the basket."

"But it isn't money, it's bits of glass . . . yes, broken glass!"

"Well, of all things! Wait, I am feeling around . . . I've got it . . . Ah! one bottle, two bottles, three bottles! Let's look further . . . four, five, six . . . my arm won't reach any further . . . what does it all mean? And this dust . . . dusty old bottles! Then that dampness must have come from bottles that I broke with my pick! I've got to make that hole larger, but this work has certainly given me a great thirst, I have centuries of dust in my throat . . . I am going to rinse it out with a good long swig, before starting work again."

The bewildered Colombe stared at the bottles, trying to understand. She could hit on no explanation. Strange! Strange! Bottles of old wine hidden in the Great Well!

"It will make you sick, Antoine, don't drink

it!" she cried at last. "It is fairy wine, it probably has a curse on it!"

"On the contrary, it is good wine, extremely good, it has quite livened me up," said Antoine, smacking his lips. "Pass me over another bottle, just to taste, to see if it is the same quality. Fairy wine? Don't tell me that; Fairies don't have wine cellars, and they don't drink wine, because there aren't any Fairies!"

"You don't believe in anything!"

"I'd rather believe that it's a private stock of the Ruler of the Visigoths."

"Or of Dame Carcas."

"Possibly! But it is a marvellous wine. That's not surprising. Let's see, how many centuries is it since the Visigoths were driven out? Just one more little mouthful . . ."

Cassagnol clicked his tongue.

"Never, no, never have I drunk anything to compare with this! It came in the nick of time, it was just what I needed to brace me up, after all these weary days! Well, I didn't steal it, anyway. . . Take a taste, it is marvellous, I tell you. I feel in fine shape now, my head is full of sun-

shine and my blood is pounding through my arms. Take these wonderful bottles very carefully upstairs and bring back the basket, for now I shall certainly reach the real Treasure, the tons of gold, yes, tons of gold, that lie beneath. Now I must clear a wider passage. Here goes!"

Cassagnol resumed his pick and sought for a joint in the masonry as a point of attack, when all at once an extraordinary thing happened. At the further side of the vault he had broken into, a light suddenly appeared.

Cassagnol shivered and was on the point of crying out, for the light was swaying and coming toward him. It was strange! It was alarming! Who was there?

In spite of himself the first thought that leaped into his mind was of supernatural apparitions. The Visigoths did not mean to let the Treasure be snatched from them; they had returned to protect it, and now the crisis had come. But it was not long before he saw clearly that the light came from a lantern, that swung in the grasp of an indistinct shadow. Ghosts have no need of lanterns,

therefore the shadow could not be a Visigoth ghost!

Then who was it?

At that moment the shadow stooped, a ray from the lantern lit up the face, and Cassagnol had hard work to stifle a cry of mingled stupefaction and rage.

Curse it all, the shadow was none other than mine host of the *Black Head,* the neighboring tavern!

So, you see, poor Cassagnol had once again missed his way in his tunnelling, and his gallery had turned toward the side of the tavern, and he had blundered into the cellar of the *Black Head Inn!* Once again he had missed the Treasure! That marvellous wine which he had drunk came from no private stock of the Visigoth governor, it was simply the wine of the *Black Head Inn.*

Yes, indeed, this was a real catastrophe! But Cassagnol wasted no time in lamenting; it would never do to let himself be caught by the inn-keeper. Softly, very softly, without making the slightest sound, he hastily replaced the stones, to block up

the opening, and, that peril over, he sadly climbed the steps to break the news to Colombe.

What a humiliation! He had to confess once more his mistake in direction, and sheepishly expose himself to Colombe's reproaches and ridicule. Was he bewitched? What diabolical power was amusing itself in making sport of him?

Colombe was now in fine position to force him to give up the search. She really had good grounds to argue that he was a little out of his head.

Oh, no! Oh, no! Cassagnol summoned all his strength of mind. It was a set-back, to be sure, but he would not give up the enterprise. The Treasure was there; perhaps all he needed to do was to veer off slightly, in order to reach it at last.

Naturally Colombe raised a loud outcry. But Cassagnol stopped her.

"Don't say any more now. You can pick a quarrel with me later if you want to. Let's set about the important thing first!"

The worthy Cassagnol had drunk the wine of the inn-keeper, and his conscience was troubled. But after all he had not done it on purpose, so

he must put that worry aside. The urgent thing was to fill in as quickly as possible the tunnel behind the break in the wall, so that if the inn-keeper noticed anything wrong with his bottles, he would think there had been an accident.

For several days Cassagnol was almost gloomy. He hardly sang at all. But he thought a good deal about the shifty-eyed stranger who lived opposite, and whom no one had seen for quite some time. Where had the fellow gone? Perhaps he had struck the right trail! What if he had already laid hands on the Treasure?

THE MARAUDERS

CHAPTER X

The Marauders

THERE were grave reasons why the King, a few months previous, had come to Carcassonne in the course of a rapid inspection of the strongholds of the southern provinces. The war with Charles the Fifth was still in course, and bands of Spaniards, landed at Roussillon, were, so it was said, menacing Languedoc.

A certain uneasiness was felt throughout the

province, but the people within the city knew that they were secure behind their impregnable ramparts. All these towers, all these accumulated defences, were not so readily brushed aside; the people could sleep in peace.

Cassagnol scarcely gave it a thought. Besides, his mind was wholly engrossed with the obsession of the Treasure, which still eluded him. He felt as though he were playing a game of hide-and-seek with Alaric, who maliciously kept moving the Treasure and changing its hiding-place, each time that Cassagnol began to get warm.

Following the adventure of the *Black Head Inn,* after a few days of gloom, he had set to work again, not with his pickaxe, but with pencil and paper. This time, he was determined not to move blindly, so he proceeded to draw a careful plan of the whole place. It was not an easy task, for he had no skill in drawing and often blundered. But he was determined to set down all the places where he had already explored, so that now he could be sure of searching in the right direction.

This passionate pursuit of riches that constantly

fled before him did not make him wholly neglect his other occupations. So long as the Treasure was not actually in his possession, it would not do to let other folk perceive that the formerly joyous troubadour lacked his usual good spirits at parties and festivals. For the family's daily bread depended on it.

So Cassagnol, putting aside the matter that filled his mind, started off today, to a big village lying south of Carcassonne, to set the guests a-dancing at the wedding of a rich vine-grower. Two whole days of dancing. They had made a bargain: a half-crown, two chickens, and unlimited food and drink. This was good pay and Cassagnol had felt that he could not scorn such a tempting offer.

As he strode along the rocky highway, Cassagnol tried to put himself in shape by humming over his most jovial songs. He rehearsed the whole of his vast repertory; dancing songs, drinking songs, fighting songs, laments, and old-fashioned love songs. His throat grew as dry as the mountain ridges, but would he not find what he needed to put it back into proper shape upon

his arrival? It was his duty to bring a good thirst with him to the wedding so as to do justice to his host's wine!

For the first day everything passed off finely. To begin with, Cassagnol led the bridal couple to the church in all solemnity. Then he brought back the whole company to the bridgegroom's home, a mile or two outside the village, and the merry-making began, feasting around well-spread tables beneath the elms, and dancing in the clear sunshine, that made the cool shade and native wine all the more welcome.

But suddenly toward evening, all this joyousness was changed into terror. The bride and bridegroom, who were heading a lively country-dance, almost dropped in their tracks, while Cassagnol's flute stopped short on one horrible false note. An alarm was ringing forth from the village church!

The dancing couples stood still in their places as if petrified by their sudden emotion, then fluttered about in bewilderment. What was happening? What catastrophe had come upon the land? The

TO CARCASSONNE! TO CARCASSONNE!

answer was not long delayed. Shouts rang out in the distance, people were seen scrambling down a hillside, screaming as they ran, while at various points rose the flare of burning buildings.

"The Spaniards! The Spaniards!"

The bell had ceased ringing. From the first of the fugitives they quickly learned the news.

It was the close of a fine day; the workers were peacefully returning from the fields and vineyards, and driving the cattle home, when all at once a troop of horsemen burst from the woods and flung themselves upon the nearest houses and began to pillage.

It was supposed that the Spaniards were still at a safe distance, that they had stopped along the coast to attack or occupy some of the small ports, while instead they had rapidly pushed their advance column into the interior. What could be done! How many of the enemy were there? Fear magnified their numbers. The clamors redoubled up on the heights and the flames of the burning homes rose heavenward.

"Quick! To Carcassonne!" cried Cassagnol. "And don't leave the provisions! Take every last

bit of them along!" and he carefully drained a flagon, to put fresh strength into his legs.

Some thoughtful lads had already flung themselves upon the food prepared for the supper that was to have followed the dancing. All was swiftly gathered up, each one doing his share, nor did they forget the half-cooked ducks and chickens, nor those prepared for future roasting.

"To Carcassonne! To Carcassonne!" repeated Cassagnol.

And the whole bewildered wedding party limped along behind him, followed by a goodly number of unhappy refugees from the burning village. A dismal ending to a day that had begun so joyously. And all those good folk, who already had put a whole afternoon's dancing into their legs, the young girls and married women who had only just now been tripping so gaily, looked forward with dismay to the long journey ahead of them. Luckily, in crossing the fields they gathered in a number of horses, donkeys and even a heifer, bewildered by the tumult. The more tired fugitives mounted their backs, and all hastened on toward Carcassonne.

At first Cassagnol pushed on his party at a rapid pace, but slowed up after they had covered five or six miles. There was no longer any object in marching so fast, since they had put a good safe distance between themselves and danger; moreover, it was useless to arrive at Carcassonne in the middle of the night, for the closed gates would not open. So they might as well draw breath and take their time.

The wedding party kept close beside Cassagnol, and gave way to their feelings, now that they were not so hurried. The bride wept in company with her mother, her mother-in-law and all her aunts, cousins and companions. The groom fairly foamed with rage. And yet the day had begun so well!

Their lamentations pierced Cassagnol's susceptible heart. Yet he could not lead this doleful troop to the sound of his flute, nor organize a dance in the city moat, when at last they arrived before the tall, gloomy shadow of the Narbonne Gate. It seemed as though the morning would never dawn, although in fact the sun rose at an early hour.

At last the city clocks rang forth the hour, and the Angelus sounded from the Cathedral. They could now enter.

Cassagnol led the way to the gate, to arouse the Sergeant of the Guard, who still persisted in sleeping.

"Ho there! It is I, Cassagnol. Hey, Sergeant, wake up, you know me well enough!"

"All right! All right!" said the Sergeant at last. And his yawns could be heard, rising above the creaking of the drawbridge chains.

At last the drawbridge dropped into place.

"Well, what on earth!" said the Sergeant, staring in amazement at all these people with their holiday clothes covered with dust. "Say, merry Troubadour, are you bringing us a wedding party at this early hour?"

"Oh, yes, it's a wedding party!" sighed Cassagnol, yawning in his turn. "The oddest sort of a wedding party!"

"And your flute? Aren't you playing your flute?"

"My flute, my flute? The Spaniards very nearly robbed me of it! Yes, this was a wedding

knocked endwise by the Spaniards. My bridal couple made twelve miles during the night and slept in the moat while we waited for the doors to open. Come, let us in quick. I must go and have a talk with Monsieur the Seneschal. Perhaps in the meanwhile it would be best to raise the drawbridge again."

The wedding party had no strength left even to lament. After briefly informing the Sergeant of what had happened during the night, Cassagnol urged them on again.

A few minutes later, Colombe in the midst of her household duties, and surrounded with her children still asleep or only just waking, was amazed and startled to see her garden and her house all at once invaded by a crowd of dusty strangers, who could hardly drag themselves along and seemed almost at their last gasp. But Cassagnol peered behind them, to reassure her.

"Come in! Come in, all of you!" he cried. "Sit down on the chairs or on the floor, as best you can, and rest. Colombe, give the bride a seat . . . they will tell you all about it . . . the wedding, the alarm, the Spaniards! As for me, I must run

and warn Monsieur the Seneschal, but I'll be right back!"

The house was soon filled with people, seated or lying on the floor, and others in the garden, stretched out on the grass, or on Cassagnol's vegetables; everybody was talking at once, and Colombe had soon heard the whole catastrophe. The bride wept, and all the little Cassagnols wept with her, while Belleàvoir thrust her head out of her lean-to and started braying sadly, by way of protest.

Cassagnol was a long time coming back, and no doubt had been detained by the Seneschal. The wedding party installed themselves, camp fashion, as best they could. Some of them fell asleep, while others attacked the provisions they had brought along and piled up wood beside the Great Well, to roast the plucked ducklings that had been saved from the disaster.

The bad news spread quickly throughout the town, and people flocked to the Narbonne Gate, where the guard had raised the drawbridge. The Square of the Great Well was filled with the crowd that had gathered around the unlucky wedding party.

To the great relief of the despairing Colombe, who hardly knew which way to turn, and was planning to retreat to the cellar, Cassagnol at last reappeared. He had hard work to force his way through the groups, who waylaid him, demanding to be told the true details.

"It's nothing! It's nothing!" he cried. "Monsieur the Seneschal assumes all the responsibility. He says that we must all quiet down and return to our homes. He himself will care for the poor villagers who have taken refuge within our walls. Provision will be made for them within the Castle itself, there is plenty of room."

At last he was free to enter his house, and the tearful Colombe flung herself into his arms, while the children all clung around his legs.

"Come, be calm! Be calm!" he bade them.

"Antoine, you are not wounded?" asked Colombe. "You are quite sure that you are not wounded?"

"No, nor killed either, I am sure of it!"

"Well, how about it? How about it?" questioned the wedding party anxiously. "What does Monsieur the Seneschal say?"

"You are going to be lodged, you poor souls, you are going to be taken to the Castle; there is no lack of space. But calm down, for Monsieur the Seneschal does not want the people to be alarmed by any harrowing stories. It will all be arranged, he makes himself responsible."

The wedding guests sighed deeply.

"Good Gracious!" cried Colombe. "Are we going to be attacked?"

"You are always borrowing trouble! Listen to what Monsieur the Seneschal said . . . By the way, my flute? Where is my flute? What has become of my flute during all this hullaballoo? I brought it home, you must find it for me . . ."

"It's here, papa, it's here!" cried Cathounette, dashing to her bed, on which a fat cousin of the bride had seated herself, and, her eyes closing with weariness, was now quietly napping, in spite of the noise.

Cathounette forced the good woman to rise, and dragged the flute from beneath the coverlet, where she had wrapped and hidden it.

"Fine, splendid, kiss me, Cathounette, you are a

sensible girl. Well then," resumed Cassagnol, "here is what Monsieur the Seneschal said:

"'If Charles the Fifth's worn-out riff-raff wish to come, we are ready for them. You have seen these Spaniards, have they wings on their backs?' —'I don't think so, Monsieur the Seneschal.'— 'No? The Spaniards have no wings? Then it is enough that I have the keys of the city in my pocket. Carcassonne may laugh at any enemy whom nature has not provided with wings, to bear him over the fifty or sixty towers of her double ramparts! Let him remember Dame Carcas, who held out for seven years against the Emperor Charlemagne. . . For my part, I will undertake to hold out longer than she did!'

"That is what Monsieur bade me tell the whole world."

"Yes, but—" murmured Colombe softly into Cassagnol's ear, "how about the tunnel?"

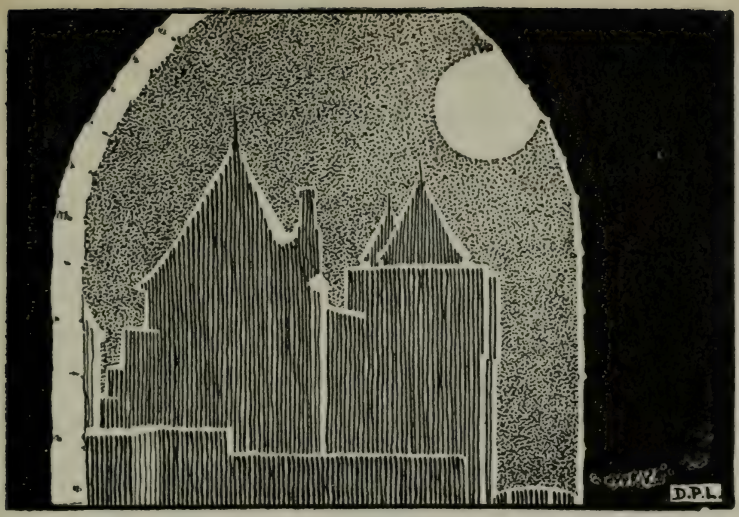
"What tunnel?"

"The tunnel under the Great Well! What if

they came in that way? All this, I am greatly afraid, is your fault, Antoine! It is the vengeance of the Fairies and the Visigoths!"

"Are you becoming altogether crazy, my poor Colombe! Hush, hush, they are coming for our poor guests; I must lead the bridal party as far as the Castle."

THE INVASION



CHAPTER XI

The Invasion

FOR several days Cassagnol did nothing but work in his garden. The season demanded it, and so also did Colombe, who assumed direction of the household and tyrannized over poor Antoine.

"No, no, the green peas and the string beans require water and care, and you will have to leave the Visigoths and the Fairies alone. A fine mess you have made of your famous Treasure! Rats

that almost ate us alive, ferocious beasts, with long, pointed teeth! I still bear the marks of them, and Belleàvoir, too!"

"How you do nag at me for a mere trifle, a brood of little mice that I overturned with my pick . . ."

"Mice that slaughtered our little ducks, when they were all coming on so well! And after that, how about it? The Visigoths' cellar, Alaric's private stock, the bottles from behind the woodpile! You drank the wine of the *Black Head Inn!*"

"Don't let's talk of that," said Antoine hastily. "I didn't do it on purpose, it was just a little mistake. Look here, I couldn't put it back, so it had to disappear, to quiet my conscience. What consoles me is that it was very good wine; because, you see, it might have been bad wine, and the sin would have been just as great. And you had your share, too."

"And well I might, so as to forget it all the quicker. All right, we'll say nothing more of it; but attend to the string beans."

Poor Cassagnol grumbled, but Colombe was right; for the moment, the garden was the pressing

matter. The vegetable plots offered magnificent promise, both in their old garden and in that of Aunt Gironne. It was thanks to Colombe's labors that all was going so well. While he was passing his time in driving tunnels, burrowing under ground in pursuit of the illusive Treasure, Colombe tended the garden with the help of the older children, or else took them all with her, including Belleàvoir, over to the old vegetable patch, now increased by an adjoining parcel of land.

"You will ruin your health, my poor Antoine, forever living in your holes," she told him. "You are quite yellow, while as for the rest of us, just see how fine we are all looking!"

Cassagnol went gloomily back and forth from one garden to another with the family, but they often saw him stop hoeing in the middle of a patch, or set down the watering pot when he was watering, to draw lines on the ground around a central point, that evidently represented the Great Well.

Colombe shrugged her shoulders pityingly.

"Oh, that poor Antoine! He is still obsessed . . . In war-time like this, wouldn't you think he might be more reasonable?"

There was constant talk of the Spaniards who had occupied ports along the coast, Port-Vendres among others. They had installed themselves and sent out marauding bands in various directions, partly for pillage, partly in the hope of taking some stronghold by surprise. Those who had come to attack the villages round about Carcassonne had been repulsed. As Monsieur the Seneschal had said, it was evident that they would not dare to match themselves against the City of Carcassonne, strong enough in her corselet of ramparts to defy whole armies.

"So long as we are at war, leave the Visigoths alone," Colombe repeated, every time that she saw her husband stop before the Great Well on his way back from the garden. "You know quite well that they can't carry off their Treasure, since the city gates are all so well guarded!"

Cassagnol never answered, but when he had assured himself that nothing had changed in the appearance of the Great Well, he turned an anxious face in the direction of the house opposite, where the man with the hang-dog look had now come back.

"Yes, sure enough, the Treasure can't fly off by itself," muttered Antoine under his moustache, "but what if they steal it from me? The old trickster is there again, and what for? His crooked smile bodes no good. All these stories of Fairies that have been handed down for no one knows how long may simply mean that there is sorcery at the bottom of the whole matter. I am quite ready to believe it, when I think of the way in which my tunnels are all turned awry by some sort of an evil spell, just as I seem to be reaching my goal. For my part, I am searching loyally, using honest methods, but how about him? Maybe he uses sorcery!"

His suspicions were increased one evening, just at nightfall, when alongside the ramparts he came upon his shifty neighbor in conversation with an old gipsy woman, the identical one who had lately tried to steal Belleàvoir. At sight of him the confabulation came to a sudden end, and the gipsy hurried off, casting an evil backward glance at him, while the sneaky neighbor slipped into a cabin built against the city wall.

What was he doing inside there? His little

garden was quite neglected, and weeds and brushwood were strangling a scanty patch of sickly cabbages.

Cassagnol lingered briefly. He would have liked to engage the shifty stranger in conversation, but the latter obstinately stuck to his cabbage patch. The gipsy was too far off by now, and anyhow, it was useless to try to question her, for what sort of a language did the old witch speak?

Cassagnol recalled this recent encounter, as he worked over his tomato vines, superb vines almost as vigorous as young trees, and with tomatoes as big as gourds. Haunted by a vague uneasiness that he could not explain, he stood watching his sly neighbor's house from behind his hedge. It was supper time, and too dark to see clearly; nevertheless Cassagnol brought his supper out into the tomato patch.

"Another new whim," said Colombe. "What are you doing out there, I ask you, instead of eating supper sensibly with the rest of us? Do you expect to hear the Fairies singing in the Great Well?"

"Leave me alone," said Cassagnol. "I have a

headache tonight, and out here I can breathe."

The hours passed, the evening lengthened and the weather seemed preparing for a storm. Dark clouds raced across the sky; and the startled moon from time to time barely showed the tip of her nose, only to go promptly into eclipse again.

As he straightened up, benumbed, and stretched his arms, a faint sound from the Square of the Great Well caused him to strain his ears. There across the way was his neighbor softly opening his gate, gliding cautiously into the street and promptly vanishing into the darkness. A pretty time for a nocturnal ramble! Where could the mysterious fellow be going at such an hour? He was certainly not starting tonight to look for Alaric's treasure.

Cassagnol might as well have gone home to bed, yet he never once hesitated. He left his garden, taking care not to let a single pebble grate beneath his step, and made his way in turn to the Square.

The other man, now barely visible, moved onward hugging the walls and hiding as much as possible under the shadow of the roofs. Cassagnol followed him step by step, lingering in the

shelter of each successive wall until the other had made a new advance.

All was in black darkness, the crowded houses where here and there some faint light flickered, the gardens in which phantom-like trees stretched forth huge black arms. The stranger turned to the right, a black silhouette fading into more blackness.

"So he's going to his garden on the rampart," thought Cassagnol. "What can he be doing there at this hour?"

What would poor Colombe have said if she could have seen her husband seated on a stone by a hole in the wall before the garden of their shifty neighbor, and keeping watch there for two long hours, his eyes strained wide open but seeing nothing, his ears alert but hearing no sound other than the rustling of the wind through the branches of the trees or the muffled rumblings of distant thunder!

What should he do? Ought he to leave the mysterious fellow there and take himself home? Cassagnol was greatly tempted, for he was tired of his fruitless watch and thought longingly of bed.

However, he could not make up his mind to beat a retreat. By straining his ears he thought that he perceived vague sounds in the depths of all that disquieting blackness, something like the clicking and rolling of stones.

"Come now, what can that be? Colombe would say that I am going mad, and perhaps she would be right . . . but all the same!"

Raising his head, he could perceive nothing but the vague outlines of the towers and the embrasures of the rampart. But Cassagnol knew each and every stone on this side of the engirdling city wall, he could find his way blindfold, with closed eyes, from tower to tower. Without making the slightest sound, he reached a stairway that led up to the embrasures and soon found himself at the top. From there he could overlook the old rascal's garden on the inner side of the ramparts, and at the same time could look down upon the palisades outside.

No, there was nothing to be seen, nothing but a murky gulf, and little if anything to be heard. Once again Cassagnol hesitated. Decidedly, would it not be better to go home to bed? And

yet he stayed. Half an hour passed. What must Colombe be thinking, back home? No, best be going. His eyes had played him tricks . . . the man was not there.

Suddenly, there came very distinct noises directly below him, the sound of stones rolling down into the palisades; and Cassagnol heard something like an oath ascend from below. Then a shadow appeared. Cassagnol thought that he could make out the form of the man he had been following. But how came the man to be outside, in the palisades, that is to say, between the first and second encircling walls? Cassagnol recalled all at once an ancient postern that had been blocked up, the former mouth of which ought to have opened at the foot of a tower, in the midst of bushes and brushwood, precisely where this man's garden now lay.

Meanwhile other shadows had appeared within the palisades, just as a ray of moonlight slipped between two clouds. It lasted only an instant, but Cassagnol had had time to glimpse dim groups of men and the gleam of weapons. A guttural ex-

clamation, a few low-spoken words—it was Spanish!

Treason! So it was not Alaric's Treasure that the old spy was aiming at, but the city itself! Cassagnol rushed down precipitately and quickly reached the man's garden. Yes, that was it, the old postern was partly opened up; that was what the fellow had been working at in the cabin he had built against the wall.

Cassagnol's first impulse was to run, shouting, and call the guard of Narbonne Gate. But before the post could be aroused and come to the rescue, wouldn't the Spaniards have made their way in? They were already within the palisades, having already scaled the outside wall without being discovered; and if they once passed in, Carcassonne was lost! The strength of the city was also its weakness: too vast a line of ramparts to guard, too many walls to defend!

What should he do? Could he possibly reach the Narbonne Gate in time? No, impossible! Then the Spaniards would succeed in entering, when all that was needed to stop the breach, which

was a mere hole none too easy to crawl through, was a few boards, a rough bit of carpentry and a pile of stones back of it. He knew all about that kind of work; he had done nothing else for months, down in his cellar, hunting for the Treasure. And despite himself he recalled the hole in the cellar of the *Black Head Inn,* and laughed in spite of the gravity of the situation.

"A few boards! Quick! I'll tear down a bit of garden fence—there's plenty close at hand—and bring it here. But shall I have time?"

He leaped, he scrambled . . . should he take the old rascal's own fence? No, it was too frail. Among the gardens bordering on the rampart, there was one quite nearby, that he knew well. Cassagnol felt as though he had the muscles of a Hercules; he tore down the fence, but the posts held firmly in the ground; it was heavy work and would take time. As he tugged at a post, he collided violently with something which he knocked over. There was an angry buzzing, and all at once he felt sharp pains darting through his hands and face. They burned terribly—what could it be?

A flash of lightning crossed the sky, and what its gleam showed him sent another illuminating flash through his brain. Ah! a hive! Bees! Hives!

This meant salvation, the Spaniards would not enter!

He rapidly caught up the buzzing hive, within which the bees were in a state of revolt; and regardless of bruises and scratches on barriers and brambles, or the chances of breaking his bones on the sharp slope, regardless too of his burning stings, he reached the breach, up which the Spaniards were scrambling, and flung his hive straight down the hole.

He did not wait to watch the effect, but plunged down again, slipping and rolling over stones and brushes, back to the bee-hives. With a second hive in his arms, he climbed up once more, gasping. There was lively action down below the postern. Cries and curses rolled forth, like the clashing of huge stones in the bed of a raging torrent.

Quick! another hive, if there were any more! There was just one left, and the Spaniards received it straight on their heads, with the furious swarm attacking their exposed faces.

It was Cassagnol now who raised his voice, hurling forth his call for the Guard of the Narbonne Gate, who certainly must have heard all this tumult, breaking the deep silence of the night.

"Carcassonne! Carcassonne! To our aid, Guard! To our aid, soldiers! The enemy is upon us!"

The two or three dozen Spaniards already within the palisades hesitated, while the members of the advance guard, climbing up through the postern, rolled upon the ground, stung to madness by the bees. The furious swarms buzzed around the first assailants, crawling under their helmets, under their coats of mail, making their way under their clothing, by way of their wrists or through the openings in their slashed sleeves.

The Spaniards who remained below caught sight of Cassagnol and fired a dozen shots of their arquebuses at him.

"Pretty good, that time! Try again, brave Hidalgos!" cried Cassagnol. "Wake up the Guard of the Narbonne Gate!"

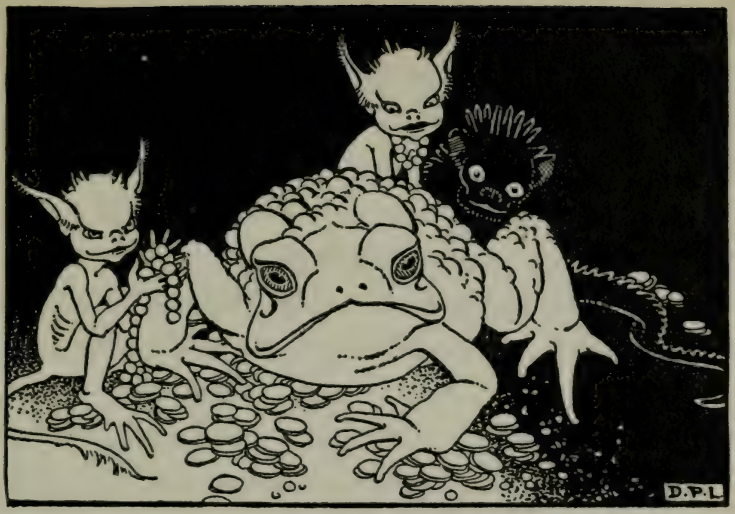
In answer to the Spanish firing, a fusilade replied from the ramparts to right and left. The

guard of the *Tour de Vade,* close by, were up in arms. From the Narbonne Gate they were also answering. Carcassonne was aroused, Carcassonne was saved!

"Ouch! Ouch! How they do burn!" said Cassagnol. "The kisses of those diabolical little bees! Oh! Ai! Ouch!"

Boom! Boom! Two cannon shot this time! It was from the barbican, the outmost defence of the Narbonne Gate. At the time of his visit, King Francis had placed two cannon there. And they were now speaking in a very fine tone.

HOW THE INNOCENT COLOMBE DISCOVERED THE FAIRIES' TREASURE



CHAPTER XII

How the Innocent Colombe Discovered the Fairies' Treasure

IT WAS all over and Carcassonne was quite safe. The few men on guard along the encircling wall and at the posts established at various points were all well aroused. There was nothing more to fear.

There was more or less clamor everywhere, both within Carcassonne and outside in the ditches. The two cannon at the Narbonne Gate were still

firing. Soldiers from the Gate arrived along the crest of the walls and fired down upon the Spaniards, who wasted no time in replying but sought only to slip outside the palisades and rejoin the body of their troop, on which the guard of the *Tour de Vade* were training their arquebuses.

Just a few of the enemy remained within the palisades. They were not dead, nor even wounded, although they rolled and struggled on the ground. They were the victims of Cassagnol, the soldiers whom the bees had conquered. They did not dream of offering any resistance when the men from the Narbonne Gate came up with torches.

Cassagnol, too, was rubbing himself hard enough to take the skin off, and would have gladly flung himself down and rolled on the pavement. He already had enormous swellings on his face, and kept blowing on his inflamed and burning hands.

"Don't come too near," he warned the Carcassonnians. "Look out for the stings! Wait till the bees calm down and go back to their homes."

He had hastily set up the somewhat battered

hives, so that the swarms could return to their quarters.

"There! there! Wait a moment, there'll soon be no danger."

"So it was you, Cassagnol," said the Sergeant, beginning to understand. "It was you who threw these little beasts down on the heads of the Hidalgos?"

"Yes, Sergeant, they were inside the palisades and were scaling the second rampart, when the idea came to me of these hives to drive them out or hold them back—and it's the honey-bees that gave you time to get here. But the stings are something fierce, Sergeant!"

The Sergeant left the Spaniards scratching and groaning, and climbed up to the embrasures of the first rampart. In spite of his pain, Cassagnol followed him. The scaling ladders that the enemy had used were still in place; but there was not a soul to be seen in the moat below, for the troops had hastened to get under cover from the cannonading and hide themselves in the foothills of the Corbières.

"Good journey to you!" said Cassagnol.

"That's over, and I am going home. By the hoary locks of Dame Carcas, those cannon shots must have waked up Colombe and the children. I must hurry, good-bye, Sergeant!"

"Good-bye, Troubadour—but don't go yet. Here is Monsieur the Seneschal, you must explain things to him."

Monsieur the Seneschal, who had also been wakened by the cannon, came running along the palisades. He had buckled on a breastplate and a helmet, from beneath which his fine silvery beard flowed resplendent. With hand on the hilt of his sword, he halted in front of the prisoners.

"Who are these fellows?" he demanded. "What horrible looking faces they have, the scoundrels! Bring up a torch! They are just simply hideous! Where on earth does His Catholic Majesty recruit his rag-tag army now?"

"It's the bees, Señor Governor, it's the bees," mumbled one of the Spaniards, who had understood him.

"Eh, what? And who's there with you, Sergeant? I'd say it was Cassagnol, the joyous troubadour?"

"So it is, Monsieur the Seneschal," mumbled Cassagnol, hampered by his swollen cheeks.

"Well, well! Have the bees been at you too?"

"Yes, Monsieur the Seneschal, I will explain if I can."

The Sergeant interrupted.

"You can't talk, Troubadour. I will explain the matter to the Seneschal for you."

The Sergeant proceeded to explain the sudden alarm, the surprise attack that was on the point of succeeding if it hadn't been for the ingenuity and devotion of the brave troubadour, who had given the soldiers time to come to the rescue.

They gathered up the booty: three dozen arquebuses, some halberds, and eighteen prisoners, among them the shifty old scoundrel, who was a Spanish spy and destined to be hanged.

All that was lacking was the old gipsy woman, who must have rejoined the invading party in the mountains, before the attack.

"Very good! Very good!" said the Seneschal. "An attack that failed, admirable! Hey, what did I say? Have the Spaniards wings, or haven't they? So long as they haven't, I shan't worry.

You see, my brave Cassagnol, that the enemy has broken his nose against our walls!"

"Yes, Monsieur the Seneschal."

As a balm to soothe the stings that gave him such terrible pain, the Seneschal promised Cassagnol a fine reward, and the latter set out for home at a run.

The cannon shots had awakened Colombe with a great start. In her fright she called for Antoine, but no Antoine replied. Other cannon shots followed, then the sound of arquebuses. What was happening?

Outside she could hear the racing steps of men on their way to the ramparts. Fortunately, the children still slept soundly. Colombe dressed herself, all in a tremble. Where could Cassagnol be? She called his name in the garden. But no Cassagnol. Could he be down cellar, starting to work on his tunnel?

Growing more and more anxious, Colombe took a candle and descended the first few steps, calling Antoine in a hushed tone. How black it was, and what a chaos all these excavations made! She narrowly escaped rolling to the bottom of one of them.

If her poor Aunt could see all this! She had had good reason to be afraid of it, and Antoine would surely end by bringing the house down!

At this moment, Colombe heard the door open upstairs and footsteps in the house. It must be Antoine coming home. She started to hurry back to the stairs; but in passing near to one of Cassagnol's tunnels, she turned her ankle on a stone and almost fell. To save herself, she caught at his props, one of which gave way, bringing with it a small landslide.

One more hole in a cellar, which looked already like an ancient ruin! Colombe groaned, but as she held her candle nearer, to examine the amount of damage, her groans gave place to a long cry of stupefaction and joy.

The cave-in had disclosed a sort of niche, and in this niche was a huge earthen jar, all covered with dust and swathed with cords, with a bag of gray cloth lying beside it. Colombe reached out a trembling hand toward the bag, and could feel that it contained round pieces that might very well be money.

Colombe tried to lift the jar out of the niche.

But the jar was very heavy. The excitement had taken the strength out of her legs, and she let herself drop down on a pile of stones. The Treasure! She had found the long-sought Treasure!

She uttered cries of joy, dragged herself up, gained the stairway and ascended swiftly to the chamber above.

"Antoine! Antoine! Are you there? Come quick, Antoine!"

She could say nothing more, but merely uttered inarticulate exclamations. Antoine said nothing either, but answered her cries of joy with a series of moans, as he continued to rub his face. Colombe dropped into his arms.

"I have found it!" she said at last. "I found it all by myself!"

"Found what?" demanded Cassagnol painfully.

The children had awakened and were stirring, while the youngest began to cry. Day had begun to break, and a few rays of light were stealing in at the window.

"Antoine, are you really here? Pinch me hard, throw a glass of water in my face, to convince me that I am not dreaming," said Colombe.

"No, Colombe, you are not dreaming, and neither am I. Ow! Ouch! How my face burns!"

"But what makes it burn? Let me see—why, your head is as big as a pumpkin!"

"It was the bees, those demons of bees!—No, no, those brave bees! Wait till I tell you— But I am in a fever . . ."

"I too, have something to tell you. You were not here, and I hunted for you, in the garden and down cellar . . . And . . ."

"And what?"

"The Treasure! I found the Treasure! Come down quick and see it."

At the word *Treasure,* Cassagnol felt all his energy newborn, he forgot his stings and burnings, seized a lantern, and plunged down the cellar stairway at a headlong pace.

"Take care! Take care!" said Colombe. "This is no time to break a leg! There was a cave-in, down in the cellar. That's how I came to find it."

"Where is the Treasure? Which side?"

"Not so far, there, right by you, don't you see?"

The abashed Cassagnol now perceived the dark niche and the big earthen jar. The candle guttered, shadows danced over the walls, and Colombe cast anxious glances around her. Might not some wicked Fairy, some frightful *Tarasque*, suddenly emerge from one of these dark holes, or might not the enraged Visigoths descend upon them, to rend them in pieces and snatch back their Treasure?

"I say, don't tremble like that, hold the light steady," said Antoine in a muffled voice. "Here, take the little bag. I have the big jar. There is nothing more behind them, is there?"

Cassagnol set the jar on the ground. They could hear the coins clinking. The jar was heavy, it must be full. No doubt, this was the long sought Treasure! Colombe fell into Cassagnol's arms, weeping with joy.

"Aie! Ouch!" cried Cassagnol. "Don't touch me, it hurts! It was those bees, the brave bees that saved Carcassonne! Oh, how they stung me —but they stung the Hidalgos a lot worse, as they were scaling the rampart! But say no more about it . . . This Treasure is the best cure."

He again shook the jar, which tinkled anew.

"What a weight! And all gold—or maybe jewels—and then there are certainly other jars. I shall explore the hiding place to the very bottom presently, if I have to send the whole house tumbling into the Great Well! Meanwhile, hand over the pick so that I can break the jar open."

"No! No!" said Colombe. "Not here, we are too near to the Visigoths! Open it upstairs."

"All right."

Cassagnol put the small cloth bag in his pocket, raised the jar with respectful care, and ascended the stairs behind Colombe, who lit up each separate step with her lantern. He was smiling, despite the smarting of his stings, and gently shook the jar, to hear the music of the Visigoth gold!

The children were still asleep, all except Hilarion and Cathounette, who were reaching across from bed to bed and pulling hair to wake each other.

"Come, little angels, it is too early to get up, it's hardly daylight yet! Sleep a little longer, Mother says so!"

Colombe cleared a place for the Treasure by

rearranging dishes, clothing and garden utensils. With eight children in the room—dining-room, kitchen and dormitory all in one—a little readjustment in the morning was not a bad idea.

"Go to sleep now, children, Papa says so too," she added, tenderly settling the more restless back on their pillows.

Cassagnol carefully set the jar on the table. He did not hurry, but his heart was beating at racing speed. After all his efforts, all his toil and trouble, at last he had the Treasure so long sought. It was there, he could touch it!

"Oh, what a looking face you have, my poor Antoine," said Colombe, deeply troubled. "Your left cheek looks as though you had both fists inside of it, and, oh, so red!"

"I can hardly speak; perhaps I swallowed a few of those brave, devilish bees!"

Cassagnol drew his knife and cut some of the cords.

"And that bump on your forehead," continued Colombe.

With one vigorous stroke, Cassagnol cut the last of the cords that held the lid in place.

"There!" said he. "Now we are going to see the Treasure. It's a great moment!"

"And your poor hands all just a mass of bites!"

"That's nothing. But I feel rather weak in the knees; get me a stool, will you."

"Wait! wait! I am all in a tremble . . ."

"No, be brave! One, two . . ."

"Take care, what if there were a snake in the jar!"

"You are silly, Colombe! As for me, it isn't fear but emotion. One! Two! Three!— There!"

And Cassagnol brusquely removed the lid from the earthen jar.

"It is full!" cried Colombe. "What a lot of money! And bags besides."

"And they are full too!" said Cassagnol. "We are rich! Look out, I am going to empty out the jar. By the horns of a *Tarasque!* How heavy it is!"

A heap of coins of all sizes flowed out upon the table, together with a few bags of old gray cloth and clouds of dust. There was also, wrapped up in cloth, a cross and a golden heart.

"Oh!" murmured Colombe, clasping her hands.

"There, you see?" said Cassagnol. "We may handle the Treasure without scorching our fingers; they were not altogether pagans, those Visigoths. Wait till I open the bags, just for the pleasure . . . "

It needed the knife to slit open those bags of heavy cloth, out of which poured more money, which Colombe started to arrange in regular piles.

"It's all silver," said Cassagnol, somewhat disconcerted. "These little pieces are nothing but silver."

"And all the others?" demanded Colombe, "the big pieces? They're gold, aren't they? You ought to know."

Cassagnol did not answer. He fingered the pile of big coins, blew away the dust and rubbed vigorously.

"Give me a cloth. It's queer, but you'd think this was copper. It's tarnished from being buried away so long—for centuries! How many centuries? No one knows now.—It must be gold, all the same."

"Of course," said Colombe. "Rub harder!"

"I never knew that gold would tarnish like that

. . . Here is a fine piece; wait till I rub it . . ."

"You don't see any diamonds? Look carefully; there ought to have been some with the gold cross. You go too fast, you scatter things. Let me look through the dust and on the floor. We must sift it all, grain by grain."

"Listen," said Cassagnol, quite out of breath, "here are all the pieces rubbed quite clean—they really shine like gold, but the light is so dim, and my eyes hurt me—they burn all the time. Let's have a look by daylight."

Cassagnol crossed over to the window, of which the lower sash was open, to let in the air. The air came in, but the light was blocked by Belleávoir, who had come out of her lean-to for her little morning promenade in the garden, and now obstructed the opening by coming to salute the family with a resounding *hee-haw*.

"Good morning, good morning!" said Cassagnol. "I say, Belleàvoir, take your head out of there! You're in my light."

The children, now definitely awake, sat up in bed or jumped to the floor, in answer to Belleàvoir's salutation.

"That's right, that's right, you are in good spirits, children," said Colombe. "Dance and sing, you have my permission, for it's a great day, today! Enjoy yourselves, but don't break things, and don't quarrel! Well, Antoine, is it gold or isn't it?"

"Yes, wait—stand back, Belleàvoir, you are sticking your ears in my eye!—Let's see: *Quatre sols tournois!* A four-sous piece from Tours, that's not gold any way. Let's try another: What's this? What's this? Am I dreaming? *Charles VIII Roi de France* . . . a Charles VIII coin mixed in with Alaric's treasure!"

Cassagnol hastily snatched a dozen coins from the pile and returned to the window.

"Ludo . . . vicus . . . Franco . . . rum . . . Rex . . . Philippus . . . Car . . . olus . . . deux sols tournois! . . . quatre sols tournois . . . Charles VIII, Louis XI, Charles of Burgundy, and a Louis XII four-sous piece! What does all this mean? Not a coin with Alaric's name, not a single Visigoth piece!"

"It's good money, just the same, isn't it?" inquired Colombe timidly.

"Good! It's too good! Let's look in the bags—It's nothing but silver—it grows more and more extraordinary!"

"If it's good money, we must make the best of it," murmured Colombe.

THE LONG AND DIFFICULT CALCULATION OF AN ENORMOUS HEAP OF RICHES

CHAPTER XIII

The Long and Difficult Calculation of an Enormous Heap of Riches

"WE MUST make the best of it," said Colombe. A wise saying, but easier said than done.

Cassagnol could make nothing of it. The fever had gone to his brain; and although he wanted to take count of the Treasure at once, the fever would not let him, for he saw double and triple. The stings continued to pain him terribly. Ah! the

bees of the rampart had well avenged the Visigoths of the Great Well for their stolen Treasure!

Cassagnol lay stretched upon his bed, and tried his best to sleep, watched over by the eight children, who promised their mother that they would neither move nor speak, and by Belleàvoir, who remained at the window, with her head hanging over her master.

Belleàvoir breathed upon Antoine's face or fanned him with her ears. It seemed to cool him. The children were very good, and it was only once in a while that two or three disputes broke the silence, followed by a *hee-haw* from Belleàvoir, no doubt reproving the children in her language.

Luc pinched Fleurette, Finette pulled Blaise's hair, Cathounette pushed Cadette, or perhaps it was the other way round. Cassagnol painfully opened an eye under his swollen lids and made a grimace. Colombe hurried in to re-establish order. She bathed her husband's burning skin with salted water and anointed his face with salve. Cassagnol groaned and talked to himself.

What a tumult was going on in his poor brain. The alarm of the night before, his pursuit of the

CASSAGNOL LAY STRETCHED ON HIS BED
WATCHED OVER BY THE EIGHT
CHILDREN

spy; the coming of the Spaniards; the weapons gleaming in the moat; the scaling party; the hives he caught up; the swarms of maddened bees lighting on their faces; the cannon shots! And then the Treasure, the cave-in down in the cellar, a wild war-dance of savage Visigoths brandishing arquebuses. There were even Fairies among them. In his fever, Cassagnol had glimpses of several Fairies, very pretty but red with anger, and with eyes that flashed fire.

The Treasure obsessed his brain. He must count it up, that was what he must do, count it up! He begged and ordered Colombe to do so immediately, but she begged off.

"I wouldn't know how," she said. "I have never seen so much money all at once. You know that, Antoine!"

Fortunately, by afternoon, Cassagnol was suffering much less and his fever had fallen. The house came to life again, the children were free to laugh and sing, and even to quarrel a little. Belleàvoir went frisking around the garden until it became necessary to check her spirits.

Cassagnol decided to get up and set himself to

the task of casting up the account, so as to know conclusively just how important this Treasure was that the innocent Colombe had wrested from the Visigoths. But what a crowd there was in the Square of the Great Well! Cassagnol was startled. Did any one suspect what had happened? Had the theft of the Treasure caused any disturbance in the depths of the Great Well?

No, the cause of the excitement throughout the quarter was simply the events of the past night. Every one knew the part played by the heroic troubadour in the midnight attack, they knew that it was thanks to his vigilance and courageous devotion that the attack was repulsed and the discomfited assailants were forced to leap from the ramparts and take themselves off through woods and ravines in the direction of the Corbières.

And since poor Cassagnol, grievously injured, lay groaning on his bed of pain, they came to do him honor, if he still had strength to receive them before his end should come.

Some of the leading citizens had appointed themselves a committee to offer on behalf of the rest their congratulations to the glorious sufferer,

and condolence to his worthy and unhappy wife.

They entered, preceded by Belleàvoir, who hastened to take advantage of the open door. Cassagnol received them, glad to shake their hands but very sorry that he was forced to interrupt his accounts. Colombe had had just time to put the Treasure all back in the ancient jar. No one had seen anything, there was no need of saying anything, it was wiser to make no mention of their extraordinary finding.

That Cassagnol, what a man! Carcassonne was sleeping, Carcassonne was lost, but he was watching! He had scented treason, had Cassagnol! And what valor, to have repulsed the attack alone by himself!"

"There were at least twenty thousand of us," said Cassagnol, "if you count the bees!"

"And now, poor man, how frightfully altered! What wounds! His head is as large as a pumpkin!"

"It won't be anything . . ."

"Brave Cassagnol, always so valiant!"

It was flattering, all this solicitude of his neighbors, crowding around his bed of pain. But Cas-

sagnol would have much preferred to be let alone. No matter, that would come later. So he made an effort to forget his fever, and rose to his feet. That was fine; they could see for themselves that he was not altogether dead. The congratulations and the hand-shaking redoubled.

The chamber was filled with people; they kept arriving and crowding in. Colombe, seeing Cassagnol more and more closely pressed and forced back into a corner, ended by losing her temper.

"You have seen him long enough, now! He is sick, poor man, and must be left alone. When he has had a good sleep and his head isn't so swollen, he will be glad to tell you the whole story of this terrible night."

"Yes, yes," approved Cassagnol, "we'll talk it all over tomorrow."

Out in the garden, the children were worried at the sight of so many people. Cadette and Fleurette sobbed, clinging to Belleàvoir, who uttered startled *hee-haws*. Little by little Colombe manœuvred the neighbors out of the gate. Happily the arrival of a messenger from the Seneschal decided them to beat a complete retreat.

The messenger brought Cassagnol the promised fine reward, a small bagful of golden crowns, and he announced that Monsieur the Seneschal, in sending news of their good city to the King, would not forget to mention the Troubadour's fine conduct.

What a day of emotions it was, after a night of such terrible agitation, but a well-spent day, all the same! Closing their door, for they wanted no more visitors, Cassagnol and Colombe felt a real need of a little quiet. Colombe spent the time in putting compresses on Cassagnol's face, while he closed his eyes, to dream and heap up project upon project. What was he going to do with all these riches, the Treasure of Silver and the Seneschal's crowns?

When night had come and the children were in bed, they were able to count up their money undisturbed. Cassagnol's fever was gone, he was feeling better, there was nothing but an urgent need of sleep. How tired he was! Cassagnol yawned, but he must work. Colombe once more emptied the Treasure pot upon the table, and they set to to work to sort out the money and arrange it in

regular piles. This took time and careful attention.

In proportion as the piles were lined up Cassagnol's enthusiasm abated, and he opened his eyes in growing astonishment. The piles were all quite in order, the heaps of big and little pieces were correctly sorted, it was just a matter of casting up the total. Cassagnol had to start all over again several times, re-adding, covering his slate with figures, rubbing out, recounting, beginning over, while his astonishment changed to stupefaction.

After all the counting and recounting, including the heaps of money in the pot and the coins in the bags, forgetting nothing, it all came to no more and no less than eleven hundred and seventy-three pounds, fourteen sous and six deniers, besides seven copper pieces that were too tarnished for their value to be determined.

How was it possible! Was Alaric no richer than that? Was this all there was of his vaunted millions? Let's count again, let's examine into this! Colombe, however, considered this an enormous sum, but she was humiliated to see that An-

toine seemed to scorn the importance of the Treasure she had unearthed.

Cassagnol, with knitted brows, was absorbed in thought.

Suddenly he struck the table a violent blow with his fist, which sent several of the piles tumbling over with a metallic sound, that was pleasant enough in any case.

"I have it!" he cried, rumpling his disheveled hair with both hands. "I ought to have guessed it in the first place, only I was sick, and the fever sent my wits all helter-skelter. Your Treasure never came from the Fairies nor from the Visigoths either. It wasn't the Fairies who hid that pot in the niche down cellar, it was your Aunt Gironne!"

"Aunt Gironne!" echoed Colombe, in amazement.

"Yes, of course, your Aunt! She was a miser—a good enough woman, but as close-fisted as they make them. She kept a hiding place, where she stored up all her savings, and you stumbled on this hiding place—that's all!"

"Oh! Are you sure?"

"Certain sure!"

Colombe let herself drop into a chair, trembling and breathless.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"Yes, indeed! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"No matter!" cried Colombe. "It is a large sum, Antoine, a very large sum, since it took you at least two hours to count it up! But you are not going to set to work again, are you, to find the Fairies' Treasure, and burrow around the Great Well, until you bring our house down on the children's heads?"

Cassagnol hesitated. He scratched his head, crossed his arms, and strode up and down the room, staring at the heaps of riches spread upon the table.

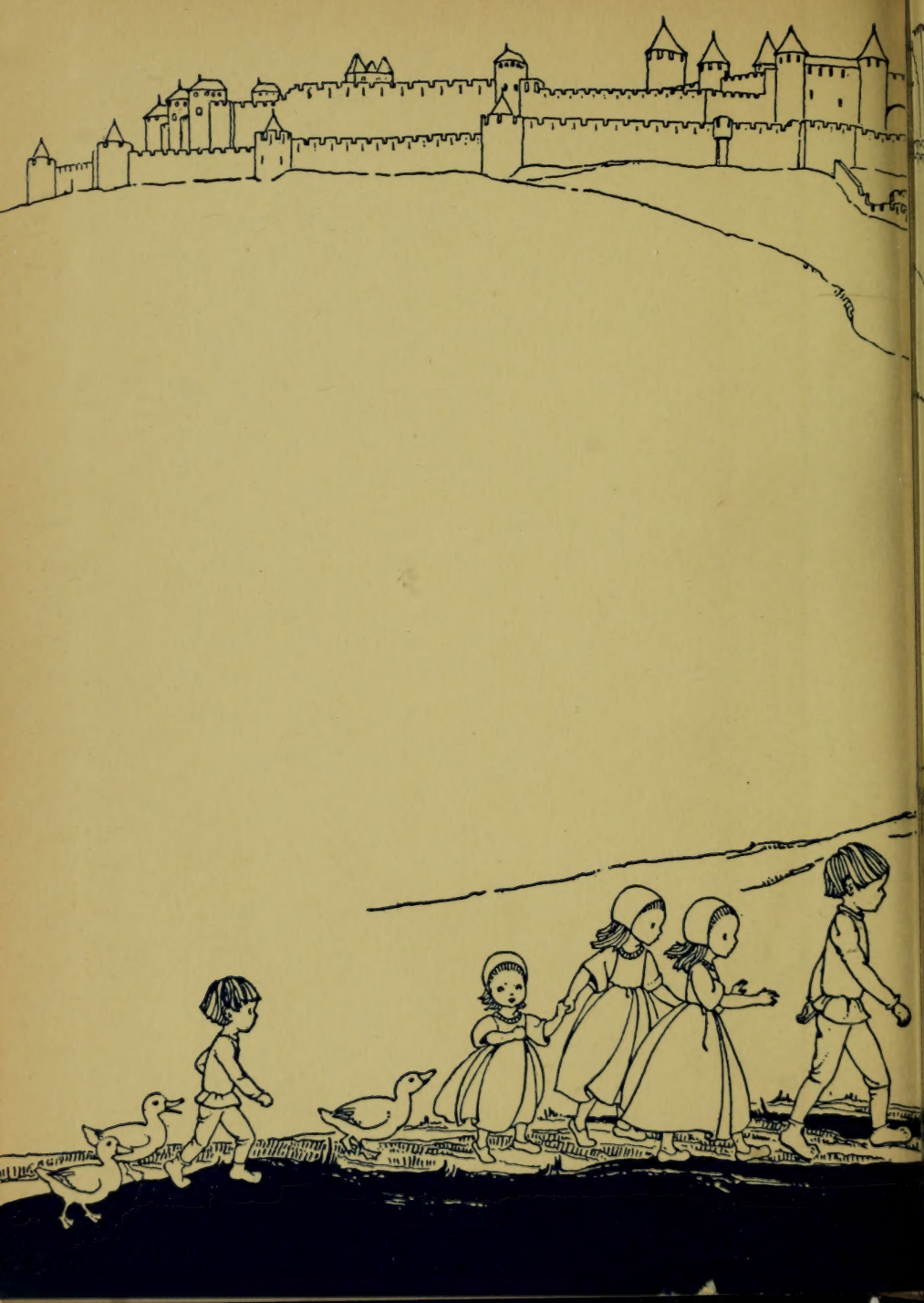
"No," he said at last, "I renounce it! On the contrary, I shall at once fill in all the holes that cost me so much labor, and put the whole house in solid repair. You are right, Colombe; with this and the fifty crowns that the Seneschal sent, we are rich. Let the Fairies of the Great Well keep their Treasure!"

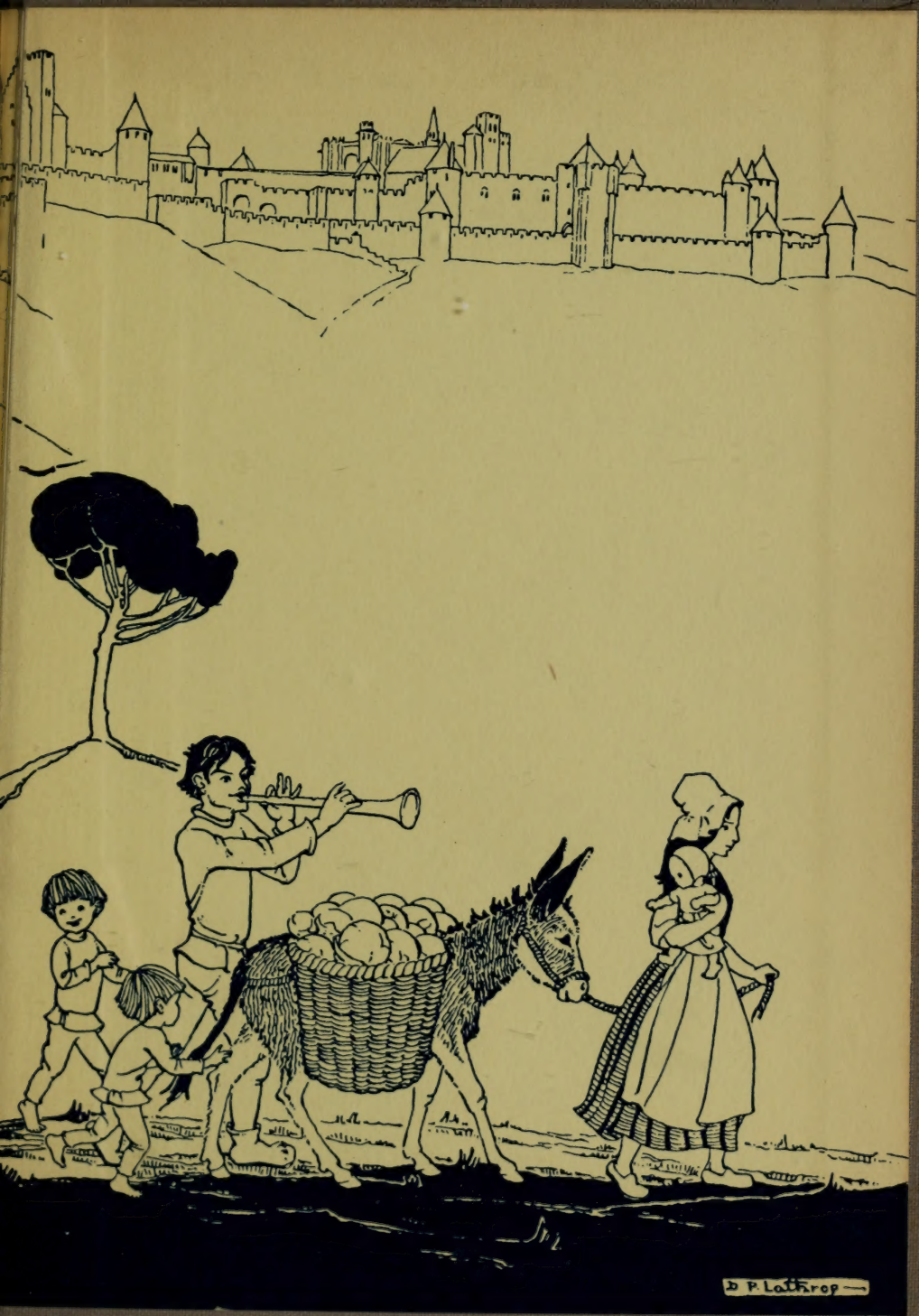
Colombe uttered a long sigh of relief and joy. At last the adventurous Cassagnol had listened to the voice of reason.

All was ending happily. Since there was nothing more to fear for herself or her children, she could now sleep peacefully, without having her dreams haunted by the phantoms of Fairies with wide, enigmatic eyes and perturbing smiles, and with no further dread of angry Visigoths, lurking in mysterious galleries of the Great Well.

And that is how the Great Well still keeps its Treasure.

It is still there, in the deepest depths of those galleries, beneath the soil of the city, and there it will remain, forgotten forever under the dust of centuries—at least until a day comes when some other rash seeker, believing himself stronger or better informed than Cassagnol and all his forerunners, takes the risk, in face of all the perils, of venturing in his turn, into the gloomy depths of the Great Well.




D P Lathrop